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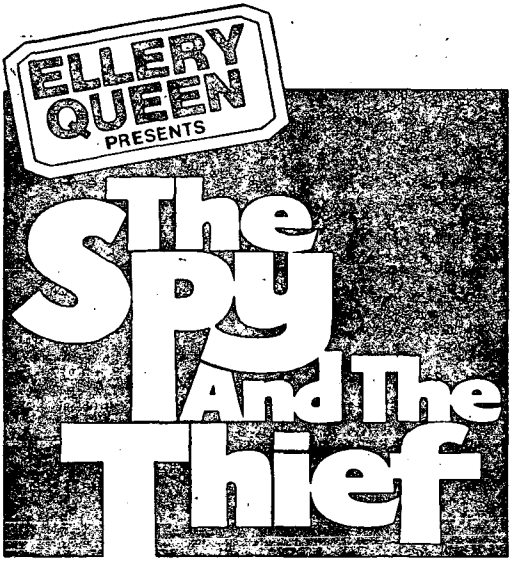

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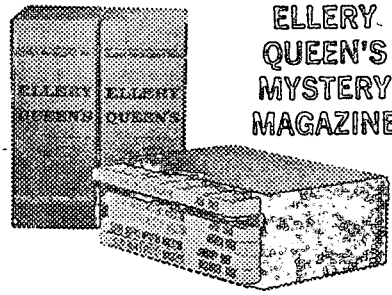

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a NEW spy-counterspy story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Number 21 in the series about Rand, the Double-C man, head of the Department of Concealed Communications . . .

About spies and counterspies: a character in this story says, "I think you guys are all in a dying occupation. Nobody wants spies any more. Hell, they don't die spouting patriotic slogans these days. They just get old and curl up and blow away in the wind."

If only that were figuratively true. It would mean that other things had curled up and blown away—like distrust between nations and men, like arms competition between nations, like war itself. Would it were literally true . . .

THE SPY WHO DIDN'T REMEMBER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Melbourne left the cab at Leicester Square and headed up Coventry Street toward Piccadilly. He walked quickly, with eyes straight ahead, altering his pace only to avoid the occasional knots of theater-goers who crowded the sidewalk. The time was 7:21, and in less than ten minutes he would give the signal that would bring Saffron out of hiding for the rendezvous.

It was a cool April evening in London, and Melbourne breathed deeply of the crisp air as he walked. He passed the Prince of Wales Theatre, where something called *Catch My Soul* was playing in its third month, then a small brightly lit bookshop that displayed the latest American bestseller in its window. Ahead, the flashing signs of Piccadilly drew him on and he felt a springy certainty in his walk. Once contact had been established with Saffron the rest would be easy.

He thought of Gilda, waiting for him back in the room, but only for a moment. There

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would be time for her later, after the evening's business was attended to—after the man named Saffron had closed the deal and sold out his country. A slight smile played along Melbourne's lips as he considered the evening's mission, and he wondered what these crowds of dull, chattering theater-goers would think if they knew. He could give them a better show than any of those on stage, and it would be played out right here, in the very center of London.

Melbourne paused for a moment on the curb, and then started across Piccadilly Circus. There was a sudden jostling behind him, and he turned his head, irritated, to utter some sharp words of complaint.

That was the last thing he remembered.

Rand met Hastings in the lobby of the hospital and he could see the lines of worry on the older man's face even before he reached him. Hastings didn't often look like that, so he knew the news was not good.

"How is he?"

"Bad, Rand. Very bad. Bad for us, that is. The doctors think he'll pull through, but there may be some brain damage."

Rand caught his breath, remembering the cheerful greetings he had always exchanged with Melbourne, the grin on the man's ruddy face as he told a funny story or listened to one. "What sort of brain damage?"

"Partial amnesia. It may be only temporary, but at this stage of things they just don't know."

"All right. Let's go see him."

George Melbourne was in a private room on the fifth floor, his head swathed in bandages and a blank staring look on his face. Rand dropped into a chair at the bedside and spoke softly. "Hello, George. How are you feeling?"

The head tilted slightly to look at him. "Who—who are you?"

"Rand, from Concealed Communications. Surely you remember me?"

"I don't—"

Hastings spoke from Rand's side. "George, we have to know about your meeting with Saffron."

"No—I don't—" And Melbourne's voice faded.

Rand stood up and moved to the window. After a few moments Hastings joined him and said, "I'm afraid it's hopeless for now."

"Just what happened to him last night?"

"He'd gone to Piccadilly to meet Saffron. I gather he'd

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worked out some elaborate signal to bring Saffron into the open for the meeting. Anyway, he was crossing Piccadilly just before 7:30 when he was hit by a bus."

"Accident?"

Hastings glanced back at the bed and shrugged. "He may have been pushed from behind, before the bus struck him. Perhaps someone didn't want the meeting to take place."

"Do we have any other leads to Saffron?"

"None." Hastings looked again at Melbourne's bandaged head and said, "Let's go back to my office. There's nothing more we can do here."

An hour later, seated in Hastings' cramped and cluttered office overlooking the Thames, Rand lit one of his American cigarettes and asked, "Just how important was Melbourne to the success of the mission?"

"Damn it, Rand, he *was* the mission! He laid all the groundwork with Saffron and arranged for the man's defection. It was to take place last evening, right in Piccadilly. Melbourne was to signal him in some manner and Saffron would make himself known."

"Just how important is Saffron?"

"Only the top Russian agent in all Britain," Hastings told him, his voice and expression a study of frustration. "He wants to come over to our side, bringing with him a full list of other Red agents operating here, along with code books and planning directives. He telephoned Melbourne at home one night about a month ago. We've been carefully reeling him in since then, but his only contact has been with Melbourne. The actual defection was set for last evening."

"Perhaps Saffron will make contact with someone else if he's that anxious to come over."

"And perhaps not. If Melbourne was pushed in front of that bus it was by someone who knew about the intended defection. That might be enough to scare Saffron off."

Rand leaned back in his chair. "You think this is something for Double-C?"

"It is, if you want those code books. There's a secret message here, all right—the message Melbourne meant for Saffron. But it's not written on any piece of paper. It's locked somewhere in George Melbourne's brain."

Rand nodded. "Where it might be beyond the reaches even of Double-C."

The girl's name was Gilda Bancroft, and Rand remembered meeting her once in

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Melbourne's company. She was a striking blonde, quite young, with the pouting face and wide lips one often saw in the cheaper London dance halls. When she opened the door to Rand she seemed to know at once why he'd come.

"George is dead, isn't he?"

"No, he's not. In fact, the doctor thinks he's coming along. I just wanted to ask you some questions. My name is—"

"Rand. I remember you. I remember faces."

She stood aside and allowed him to enter. Her apartment was little more than a sparsely furnished loft—a long narrow room with wide windows looking out on a dreary street scene. The room had been partitioned into sleeping and eating quarters by the addition of a folding screen of some vague oriental design.

Gilda directed him to a couch in what was meant to be the living-room section of the apartment. The furniture there seemed fairly expensive, and he suspected that Melbourne had bought it for her.

"I saw him this morning," Rand said. "He's going to pull through."

She eyed him uncertainly. "Then what do you want from me?"

"We know he's been seeing a great deal of you lately, Gilda."

"Yes," she admitted. "What's wrong with that? He's divorced from that bitch he was married to."

"Nothing's wrong." Rand tried to soothe her. "George was working on an assignment and we're trying to piece it together. We thought you might be able to help us."

"He didn't talk much about his work," she murmured.

"Did he tell you who he was meeting in Piccadilly? Did he ever mention a man named Saffron?"

She didn't answer immediately, but sat there regarding him with a calculating uncertainty. Finally she said, "I don't know how much I should tell you. I don't want to get George in trouble."

"Believe me, you'll be helping him. Anything you can tell us—"

"He went there to meet Saffron. He was quite excited about it, really. He talked of nothing else ever since this Saffron began calling and writing him."

"There were letters?" Rand asked. He didn't remember Hastings saying anything about letters.

"Yes. He showed them to me. They're with his things."

Rand's heart beat faster. "May I see them, Gilda?"

She retreated into a pout. "I

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don't think he'd like that. They're here in his brief case, but he wouldn't like me going through it."

"I can assure you it's all in the national interest. The man named Saffron is a Russian agent—an important agent. He wants to come over to our side."

"I know. That's why George went to meet him."

"Get the letters, please."

She hesitated a moment longer and then stood up. He watched her disappear behind the screen, then return in a moment with two envelopes. "Here, I do hope it's all right."

Rand glanced at the postmarks and opened the first envelope. The letter was neatly typed, brief and to the point: *I am writing as I promised. The offer to come over to your side is a real one, and I will be in Piccadilly Circus every evening at 7:30, waiting for your signal. I long to flee the Russian yoke, and live with the freedom of one of your English blackbirds.*

There was no signature.

"He received that one about two weeks ago," Gilda Bancroft said. "The second one just came last week."

Rand opened it and read: *I have been waiting in Piccadilly Circus, even though I know it is too soon for your signal. I long to come over, but I know I must be careful. When you light up the sky with the numbers I give you, I know it will be safe, and I can live out my days in London like a good fat hen.*

Again there was no signature.

"This is all?" he asked the girl.

"All he showed me."

"Let me take these. It'll be all right. I'll give you a receipt for them, and when Melbourne is back on his feet I'll make it right with him. You won't get into any trouble."

"I hope not."

He rose to leave. "Is there anything else you can remember?"

"No."

"I'll be going, then."

She saw him to the door. "It's hell."

"What is?"

"Having a spy for a lover."

Hastings looked at the letters and read them over carefully. "They seem authentic," he said at last, "though there's really no way of knowing for certain. Mailed a week apart, here in London."

"It seems to me that Saffron is being unusually cautious. Why not simply arrange the meeting and then do it? Why all this playing with telephone calls and letters?"

Hastings leaned back, swivel-

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ing his chair around toward the window. "Saffron is a spy, Rand, the same as George Melbourne, the same as you and I. They can call us by all the fancy names they want, but we're still simply spies. Or counterspies—spying on the spies. After a time I think it begins to affect one's mind. Just look around you—Colonel Nelson forced into retirement with a nervous breakdown, Melbourne in the hospital with amnesia—"

"You can't blame Melbourne's condition on his work."

Hastings shrugged. "The doctor's not so certain. The bump on the head really shouldn't have caused all that damage. They think now it may simply have triggered a pent-up anxiety caused by overwork. Speeded up some sort of breakdown that was coming on anyway."

"And Saffron?"

"Why should the other side be any different from ours? Saffron may have become obsessed with passwords and secret messages. Then, too, he may want time to be certain he could trust Melbourne." He picked up the second letter. "*Light up the sky with the numbers I give you*—what do you make of that, Rand?"

"The signal was to be in the form of numbers. When Melbourne showed them in some way, Saffron would know he was safe to identify himself."

"Numbers in the sky? What could it mean?"

"I think I'll go over to Piccadilly this evening and try to find out."

Standing in the center of the famed intersection Rand imagined himself feeling much as George Melbourne must have on the previous evening. He glanced around at the colorful signs, occasionally allowing his eyes to wander down to street level, taking in the crowds of theater-goers and diners.

It was just 7:30, and if Saffron's letters had told the truth the Russian agent was somewhere in Piccadilly Circus at this very moment, waiting for the numbered signal that would light up the sky for him. Rand stared hard at the sky, but there were no numbers up there—only the inky blue of approaching night. He read the news bulletins on the moving electric sign along the south side of the intersection, but there was nothing for him there. He turned north, toward the line of movie theaters with their twinkling marquees, but all he saw were more people.

"Well! Mr. Rand!"

He turned, startled, and saw

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that the speaker was a bearded man named Max Stroyer, a sometime police informer whom Rand had dealt with on occasion. "How are you, Max?"

"What brings you to Piccadilly, my friend? Looking for a woman?"

"Hardly."

"I didn't think so." He stepped a bit closer, lowering his voice. "Then you must be on an assignment. Looking for spies and codes?"

Rand gazed at the bearded man, whose sharp brown eyes were on a level with his shoulder. "Let me buy you a beer, Max," he said suddenly. "There's a pub across the street."

"You think old Max can help you, eh?"

"Maybe."

Stroyer drank his beer while Rand was still waiting for the head on his to settle. "Now what do you want to know?"

"About a man named Saffron. Ever hear of him?"

Stroyer screwed up his face. "You're on to big things, ain't you?"

"Then you do know him."

"Not really. But I've heard the name. They say he delivers the information when it's needed."

"To the Russians?"

"Sure. Who else?" He finished the dregs of the beer. "I think you guys are all in a dying occupation. Nobody wants spies any more. Hell, they don't die spouting patriotic slogans these days. They just get old and curl up and blow away in the wind."

"Yes," Rand agreed. "I suppose you're right."

"You know I'm right. Don't let it happen to you, Rand."

"Max, where can I find Saffron?"

"Maybe he's right here, listening to us now. Remember those old war warnings? *Even the walls have ears!*"

"If you see him, Max, tell him I want to help him. Tell him he can reach me at this phone number."

"Hell, I won't see him."

"If you do, Max."

"All right. Sure."

In the morning Hastings came into Rand's office in the Department of Concealed Communications. "The doctor phoned to say that George is much better. His memory seems to be returning."

Rand sighed with relief. "Thank God! I was beginning to think we were at a dead end."

"There's something else, too."

Rand saw the envelope in his hand. "What is it?"

"I sent a man over to

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George's apartment last night, since he lives alone. This was in the mail. Looks like another letter from Saffron."

Rand studied the postmark. "Mailed the day of George's accident."

He ripped it open and read the familiar typed sentences: *This is my last letter. I look forward to meeting you soon, beneath the lights of Piccadilly Circus. I am ready to come over. I have the codes and the lists you want. I will end my days sitting in the park, watching the swimming swans.*

Rand put the letter in his pocket with the other two. "Come on. Let's go see Melbourne."

They found him sitting up in bed, a good color in his face and a tentative smile on his lips. "I say, don't I know you two? Let's see . . . Rand. Is that it? Rand!"

Rand smiled and shook his hand. "Glad to have you back with us. We were worried."

Melbourne touched his bandaged head. "It's all coming back to me, slowly. But I don't remember everything yet." He turned his head slowly toward Hastings. "I'm afraid I don't remember you, sir."

Hastings cleared his throat and identified himself. "That's all right, George. Think nothing of it."

"Do you remember anything about Saffron?" Rand pressed.

"Saffron . . . Saffron . . . I don't . . . The name seems familiar, though."

"Numbers. Piccadilly Circus."

"No . . . I was there, though, wasn't I? That's where it happened. The accident."

"Why were you there, George?"

He looked blank. "I don't remember."

The following morning Rand found Hastings working at the main information computer bank. "Any word on Melbourne today?" he asked.

"Still coming along, but it's slow progress. Damn it, Rand, I hate to think of Saffron standing in Piccadilly Circus every night just waiting for the signal to defect, and we can't give the signal."

"You don't hate it half as much as I do. Perhaps we should simply put up a sign there and run a newspaper ad."

"And have him killed before he could do anything? Someone almost killed Melbourne, remember."

"I've been thinking about that," Rand said, watching the older man as he selected a reel of computer tape. "Are we really so sure that's the way it happened?"

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"What do you mean?"

"Perhaps somebody lured Melbourne there to kill him for private gain, for some personal motive unconnected with Saffron."

Hastings shook his head. "You don't lure someone to the busiest spot in London to kill him; Rand." He punched a series of buttons on the machine and watched the reel begin to spin. "What about the letters? Any luck?"

"Not a thing. If they're concealing the number to be used as a signal, it could be done in any one of a hundred ways. Count the words, count the letters, substitute numbers for the first letter of each line, or the last letter. Add the dates shown on the postmarks, or subtract them. Everything is numbers, Hastings."

"Any idea what we should do?"

"Just wait for his memory to return. And hope Saffron will wait, too."

Rand went back to the hospital that afternoon and found George Melbourne with a visitor. She was a sad-faced middle-aged woman named Clare, who proved to be Melbourne's ex-wife. After the introductions she stared hard at Rand across the bed and finally said, "I hope you're pleased with what you've done to him."

"I didn't do it to him, Mrs. Melbourne."

"Don't call me that! It's not my name any more!"

"Sorry."

"Your foolish little children's games, your spying behind trees! The world doesn't need you any longer, Mr. Rand."

"So I've been told."

"You see what you've done to his mind?"

The man in the bed stirred uneasily. "Clare . . ."

She had worked herself close to tears. "Why did I even come to see you? Go back to that tramp you spend the nights with. Go back to your spy games!" She turned and left the room.

"I'm sorry," Rand said. "I'm afraid that was my fault."

"Not at all," Melbourne reassured him. "She was always that way."

Rand pulled up a chair. "How's the memory coming along."

"Good, good."

"Saffron?"

"Yes. It's vague, but I'm beginning to remember. A Russian agent, here in London. He telephoned me at my apartment and offered to come over to our side. I . . ." He put his hand to his head.

"That's all right, George. Take it easy." Rand drew the

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letters from his pocket. "After the phone calls he sent you these letters. The third one arrived after your accident."

Melbourne read over the letters with growing excitement. "Yes, yes! I remember these first two—it's coming back to me now. He wanted some sort of signal, so he'd know he was surrendering to me and not to someone else. He said he knew of me, trusted me. We agreed that I would flash a number over Piccadilly Circus at 7:30 in the evening. Then he would walk to the center island where I'd be waiting, and identify himself."

"He gave you the number over the phone?"

"No," Melbourne answered slowly. "He said he'd send it to me, in case his phone was tapped. He said he'd send it in three letters, because the chances of all three falling into the wrong hands were slim."

"Who did he fear so much?"

"The Russians, I suppose. He was bringing valuable data with him. If they knew his plan to defect, they would have killed him to keep the data out of our hands."

"Tell me about this number. How were you going to signal him? What does he mean in this letter about lighting up the sky?"

But the dazed look had returned to Melbourne's eyes. "I can't . . . it's there but I can't quite grasp it, Rand. Perhaps tomorrow more of it will come back to me." He smiled pathetically. "I'm trying. I really am."

"I know you are, George."

Rand went back to Piccadilly that evening and watched the crowds at 7:30. They were only faces to him, and he saw no one he knew except the bearded Max Stroyer, who was lounging in a pub doorway. Rand felt frustration running deep within him as he watched the people passing, fully realizing that any one of them might be the person he was seeking—any one of these men or—

He found the nearest coin telephone and called Hastings at home. "I'm in Piccadilly," Rand explained. "Something just occurred to me."

"What?" Hastings asked.

"Could Saffron be a woman?"

"A woman? We never considered that possibility. Why?"

"In the second letter there's something about *living out my days in London like a good fat hen.* Well, a hen is female, right?"

"I can't deny that."

"Why would a man use the phrase?"

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"No idea," Hastings admitted.

"All right," Rand sighed. "It was just a thought." He hung up and went back to watching faces.

Two days later Rand took Gilda Bancroft with him to the hospital. Melbourne was sitting up and the bandage was gone from his head, revealing only a bump and some irregular stitches across his forehead. He remembered Gilda and rose unsteadily to greet her.

"I wondered if you'd ever come," he told her.

"Mr. Rand brought me. It's so far on the bus."

He turned to Rand. "I'm coming along fine. They say I can go home in another few days."

"That's good."

"I've been thinking about Saffron. We really do have to get to him somehow."

"Any suggestions?" Rand asked.

Melbourne sat down again. "It's a number. I know it is. A number in three parts."

"Three digits?"

"Perhaps more. I can't be sure."

"And where were you going to put the number?"

Melbourne frowned out the window, searching the sky. "High up somewhere. On a sign. On a moving sign."

"Yes," Rand said, remembering the moving news bulletins. That was where it had to be, the number in the sky that would lure Saffron out of hiding. "And the number was hidden in those three letters."

Melbourne nodded. "I just can't remember the details, though."

"What about the accident? Can you remember how it happened?"

"There was a jostling behind me. I started to turn—"

"He needs his rest," Gilda Bancroft interrupted. "You can't go on questioning him like this."

"No," Rand sighed. "You're right, of course. Take it easy, George. I hope you're out of here the next time I see you."

He waited in the hall for Gilda and she joined him in a few minutes. "He's better than I expected," she said.

"Yes, he's coming along."

"What about you? Any luck with your investigation?"

"Some. Mainly we're waiting for George's memory to come back."

"The man he was going to meet that night—Saffron—will he wait?"

"We can only hope so."

They walked outside, into the blinding April sunlight, and headed back toward Rand's little car. "When he's better I

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hope he quits this business," she said.

"Everybody wants us to quit. Two people told me the same thing in recent days. Nobody wants spies any more. Nobody wants war."

"George said his ex-wife came to see him."

"Yes."

"I met her only once. She's a bitch."

"She probably feels the same about you."

Rand climbed the worn stairs to the second floor of the office building overlooking Piccadilly Circus. The man he'd phoned was waiting for him and showed him into a narrow, crowded room dominated by a large desk with a typewriter-like keyboard.

"This is where we do it, Mr. Rand," the man explained. His name was Hawkins, and he was an employee of the London newspaper which ran the electric sign with its moving news flashes. "The message is punched onto tape by this machine, and the tape is then fed through here. The tape can be made into an endless loop to repeat the same news bulletins, or new messages can be added. Occasionally we might send through some random letters or numbers just to test the system, or to see if all the thousands of individual light bulbs out there are working properly."

"And George Melbourne asked you to flash some numbers for him?"

The man nodded. "Mr. Melbourne came to me about two weeks ago. He identified himself and explained that it was a national security matter. He said that on a given night he would supply me with a number which I would run once on the news bulletin at exactly 7:30. It was a simple enough request, so I agreed to it."

"And the night was to be—?"

"He phoned last Tuesday—the day you say he was hit by the bus. He gave me the number and said to run it that night. I did as he said, but never heard any more about it. I never even knew he was injured until you told me today."

"He actually gave you the number?"

"Yes. I have it written down here. Do you want it?"

Rand picked up a pencil and jotted down six digits. "Was this it?"

"Yes. How did you know? Did Mr. Melbourne tell you?"

Rand shook his head. "A man named Saffron told me."

Two days later George Melbourne was released from the hospital. Rand and Hastings

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were waiting for him and they drove to his apartment while Rand outlined the plan. "I have the number, George. I figured it out from the three letters. You don't have to remember it now."

Melbourne looked relieved. "That's good. That was the one thing I still couldn't come up with."

"We can flash it on the sign, George, but we need you there. Saffron knows you and trusts you. The night you were injured, the number flashed on, but he didn't reveal himself—simply because you weren't there. I want you to come to Piccadilly with us tonight, George, and stand on that island in the center."

"Mightn't it be dangerous?" Hastings objected. "He was almost killed the last time."

"We'll be there," Rand assured him. "One of us on each side."

They arrived in Piccadilly shortly after seven, when the sky was still bright with the memory of the spring day, and the usual theater and dinner crowds were filling the sidewalks on all sides of the circle. Standing there on the center island, facing the moving sign above them, Rand could almost imagine what Saffron must have felt on all those nights. He only hoped it wasn't too late.

"You said you knew the number," Hastings prompted him.

Rand nodded. His eyes were scanning the crowds on the opposite sidewalk for a familiar face. "The part about the hen, in the second letter. It didn't really make sense, until I realized that each of Saffron's three letters ended with some reference to an animal. The first letter had blackbirds, the second had the hen, and the third had swans. If there was a number concealed in the letters, it was most probably concealed there. Now, are there any numbers connected with these three animals? Yes, there are—*four and twenty blackbirds*, from the famous nursery rhyme, gives us the number 24."

"But what about that good fat hen?"

"Another nursery rhyme, Hastings. *One, two, buckle my shoe*, and *nine, ten, a good fat hen.* Which makes our number so far read 24910." Rand's eyes were on the moving sign above them. It was almost 7:30. His eyes scanned the crowd once more. If he was wrong all three of them could be in deadly peril. If he was right—

"The last part of the number?"

"Those swimming swans. *Seven swans a'swimming*, from

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The Twelve Days of Christmas."

At his side Rand saw Melbourne tense. It was exactly 7:30 and the ribbon of light bulbs had gone suddenly blank. Rand continued talking, his voice a bit louder than he'd planned. "Making the full number 249107—the number that will bring Saffron out of hiding. The number that—"

And there it was, above them, starting its bright lonely journey down the track of light. 249107.

At his side George Melbourne turned and said, very quietly, "My name is Saffron. I am a Russian agent. I want to defect."

It was morning before Rand could talk about it, and he sat again in Hastings' office overlooking the muddy Thames and thought about the labyrinthine ways of the human mind.

"You mean you knew it all the time?" Hastings asked, incredulous.

"Not all the time, no." Rand was feeling very old. Once, long ago, George Melbourne had been a friend. "And even at the end I wasn't absolutely certain—not till he spoke. But I had to get him there to see the number on the sign. I knew if Melbourne and Saffron were two parts of the same person, the number would trigger Saffron's defection."

"It's like something out of Jekyll and Hyde!"

Rand nodded. "Or Freud and Jung. Melbourne was a double agent in the truest sense. I think he began as any other double spy, simply playing both sides, but something happened along the line. Saffron gradually became an entirely separate personality—so much so that when he decided to come over to the British side he insisted on surrendering only to Melbourne. That's when the letter writing began, and the imaginary phone calls."

"And the accident?"

"It really was an accident, a jostling by the crowd. Of course Melbourne must have been under tremendous mental pressure that night, and the slightest damage to his head brought on the temporary amnesia. Remember, the doctor told you he suspected some pre-existing mental condition that was merely triggered by the accident. That was the only danger last evening. If I was wrong, and someone had tried to kill him, our lives might have been in jeopardy standing out there. But I was almost certain I was right."

"How could you have known, though, Rand? I never suspected such a thing."

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"The number. It was all in the number. Melbourne went to meet Saffron last Tuesday night *knowing the complete number.* In fact, he'd even phoned the sign man that day and told him the number to flash on the screen of light bulbs. But remember, the third and final letter did not arrive at Melbourne's apartment till the following day, the day after his accident. On Tuesday he could not possibly have known that 7 was the final digit of the number. He could not even have guessed at it, because the first two letters contained two-digit and three-digit numbers, both from nursery rhymes. The final letter contained a one-digit number from a Christmas song. Melbourne could not possibly have anticipated that final number—he could have known it only if he had originated it, only if he had written the letters himself. Only if, in short, he was Saffron."

"What will happen to him now?" Hastings wondered.

"That's for the doctors to say. In my opinion he's pretty far gone on this split personality.

"And the codes and lists he was to deliver?"

"I think he'll tell us about them. If he doesn't, I have an idea where they might be found—in that brief case of his at Gilda Bancroft's apartment."

Hastings nodded, stirring uneasily behind his desk. "What was it that did it to him, Rand? Overwork? His wife? What pushed him over the line?"

There was no simple answer. Rand stood up and walked to the window. The river seemed darker than usual this day. "He was on the road to madness, Hastings, and the games we play were too much for his mind. Sometimes, when I think about it, I wonder if we're not all on the road to madness—the spies and the generals—and even the politicians who pay us. We're in a world that doesn't want us any more, and maybe Melbourne knew it."

"I think he did," Hastings said quietly. "I think we all know it. But we keep on with it anyway."

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a *NEW* crime story by

BERKELY MATHER

Young Dominic had stolen and stashed a Contiverdoso. There were only two in the world, one in England and one in the Louvre, and young Dominic didn't want the English one to go to America—even for half a million dollars . . . a breezy "art" yarn in British slang-and-vernacular—"these arty-crafty blokes are a rum mob" . . .

NO QUESTIONS ASKED

by BERKELY MATHER

When Mr. Waltenhapper, the eminent art dealer, arrived breathlessly at the side door of the Old Bailey, Willy the Weeper met him and said sorrowfully, "Too late, guv'nor. He's dahn the steps with a Jacks-alive up his jumper. Bit heavy for an amerchoor—but he was dead cheeky and the Old Cock must of had a bit of a liver on."

And that was indeed the truth. Translated into more conventional English, young Dominic Crayson, of hitherto unblemished character, *had* been a bit pert in his remarks to the Judge and was even now starting on a sentence of five years' imprisonment.

"So unnecessary," Mr. Eustace Skinner, Q.C, his counsel, was saying impatiently in the cell down below. "Give the wretched thing back and we could get it reduced on appeal to eighteen months, and perhaps a suspended sentence."

"Not bloody likely," Dominic said firmly. "What would be the point in my stealing it in the first place if I did that?"

"What *was* the point?" Mr. Skinner demanded. "Come on, the thing's over now, and you can tell the truth."

"I've told the truth," Dominic insisted.

"You mean to say that you're willing to waste five years of your young life in prison just to keep a stupid picture in this country?"

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"Just that—and it's not a stupid picture. It's a Contiverdoso. There are only two in the world—one here and one in the Louvre—and that dirty-fingered swab Waltenhapper was arranging to sell ours to a detergent manufacturer in Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.—for half a million stinkin' dollars. Over my dead body."

"Listen," Mr. Skinner begged. "All right, so you've stolen it and hidden it to keep it here. What good is it to anybody now? Pictures are for hanging on walls and looking at."

"And this one can go back on its wall at the Gallery—just as soon as the Government gives me a guarantee that they'll prohibit its export."

"You really think the Government will allow itself to be held to ransom like that? Ridiculous." Mr. Skinner breathed hard through his nose.

"Governments change," Dominic said. "As a matter of fact, the Arts and Culture bloke was up at Oxford with my old man, and I happen to know he's sympathetic."

"I'll send my chief clerk to see you from time to time," Mr. Skinner sighed. "Just in the hope that prison will knock a little of this absurd idealism out of you. Behave yourself and you can earn a third remission."

A guard put his head in and said, "There's a geezer out here wants to see you. Sobbing his heart out, he is. He your dad or something?"

But it wasn't Dominic's father; it was Mr. Waltenhapper, and the loss of his commission on the sale was weighing on him heavily.

"Fifty thousand dollars," he kept repeating piteously. "And double that from the insurance boys, if it's done nice and quiet by a gentleman that knows the business. A gentleman like me."

But Dominic stood firm, even when Mr. Waltenhapper came up to fifty-fifty, and went off to do his porridge—in Rentonbury, the big long-term nick where I happened to be doing mine. Dominic was a nice kid. We worked together in the bookbinder's shop for over two years, and he told me all about it—all, that is, except where he'd stashed this expensive bit of canvas.

That worried me, because I knew what the insurance boys were like in these really big heists. The investigators are all ex-Yard dicks, freed from the tyranny of Regulations and accordingly entirely without inhibitions. They'll speak you fair and bribe you to the eyebrows at one end of the scale, and kick the hoppin' stuffin' out of you at the other.

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All they want is the swag back and the underwriters off the hook—and no questions asked. They're paid on results and that makes them very eager indeed. Me, I'd settle for a regular bogey any day of the week, even the old-timers who can give you an elbow in the short ribs or a clip behind the ear'ole without leaving a mark.

Now don't get me wrong. I wasn't trying to con the boy out of anything. It was just as I said. I was worried about him. I told Eileen on visiting day to get a couple of my chinas to put their ears to the ground to see what was cooking—and she came back the following month with a right old menu. There was certainly going to be a Welcome Back Dear Dominic party waiting for him outside the pearlies on Release Day, which, provided we kept our noses clean, was the same for both of us. Not only were the insurance boys laying it on, but Willy, old Waltenhapper's man of affairs, had retained a couple of tearaways to be there also.

I told Dominic about this, but it didn't seem to worry him much. He just said thanks, Wilf, and carried on with his painting. And very good he was at it, too. Anything from copies of photos of the guards' wives to big things on the walls called Muriels or something. He could even make some of the slags look human—and yet you could still tell who they were meant to be. One Muriel he did on the wall of the single guards' Mess was a beauty. "Aphrodite Arising from the Foam," he called it. They had to cover it with blankets when the Visiting Board came round.

The release procedure never varies at Rentonbury. You get your civvies back from the tailor's shop the night before, all cleaned and pressed, and you yawn, smoke, and scratch yourself all night, but never sleep; then in the morning you tell the kitchen blue-band for the last time just what he can do with the breakfast, and at long last the pearlies open for you and two guards take you down to the station in a truck and lob out your tickets and travel money to you.

I wasn't bothered about the early part of the trip. They couldn't do much while Dominic was in the nick truck, nor yet at the station, where the local Law usually gathered to see us off. I reckoned that Waterloo would be the place and I advised Dominic to hop off the train when it stopped at Clapham Junction—right at the last moment as it was starting again. He was sensible about it and said he'd do just that.

"Where are you going to

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hang out?" I asked him. "Don't tell me if you'd rather keep it to yourself."

"I'm going to my flat," he said. "My old man has been paying the rent."

"Are you crazy?" I yelled. "They'll be waiting for you." But he grinned and tapped the side of his nose.

"Don't worry about that," he told me. "Not my *old* pad. A friend of mine took another one for me in a phony name."

"Still a risk," I grumbled. "Take my advice and disappear for a bit until you know what the form is."

"Thanks, Wilf," he said. "You've been a real pal inside and I won't forget it—but I can look after myself."

He gathered up his suitcase and overcoat and prepared to jump at the Junction, but the damn train didn't stop there, and the next thing we knew we were in Waterloo.

I kept my eye skinned walking down the platform half a pace behind him—and I hadn't been wrong. Two large gents in sober gray suits and trilbies loomed up beside him, and one said, "Mr. Dominic Crayson? We're police officers and we'd be obliged if you would accompany us."

"What the hell for?" Dominic demanded. "I've paid my debt to society."

"Just a formality on release, sir," said the bogey. "You can be on your way in half an hour."

"When did you rejoin, Toby?" I asked him, because I'd recognized him by now. "To the best of my memory you retired from the Force a couple of years before I copped my last poultice."

He turned and smiled at me sweetly. "Old Wilf, as sure as I stand here," he said. "Nice to see you again, Wilf. Now suppose you drift, sharpish like, eh? Or do I have to show you the way?"

"I never thought I'd see the day dawn," I said. "Toby, here's where I get struck off the roll. I'm going to holler for the cops. The real, active, fully paid-up and operative cops."

"What do you mean?" he said, and I saw a swift look pass between them.

"I'd like them to have a look at your warrant cards," I told him.

"Try it," he ground out of the side of his mouth like they do on the telly.

I turned and made a beeline for a uniformed fuzz standing by the bookstall watching the miniskirts go by, and I asked him what bus I got for Streatham. He told me, and when I turned and went back to Dominic, the two ex-bogeys

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had scarpered, quick. There's no Old Boys' League in the Force, and impersonating a police officer is a serious offense.

"You see what I mean?" I said to Dominic, and he looked serious and nodded as we went out and got a taxi. Looking back as we drove down the ramp I saw the two of them diving for a car in the parking area. I paid the cab off in the Strand and we ducked into the Underground and then by devious routes made for Eileen's place.

Eileen looks a bit like Two-ton Tessie, with a heart built proportionately, and she didn't mind Dominic living with us for the nonce. We had three callers that first day—a gent who wanted to read the gas meter, another one who wanted to sell her a vacuum cleaner, and one who wanted to come in and discuss how she'd voted in the recent elections. They may have been genuine, but she met them all at the front door with a kind smile and said not today thank you and they departed without argument. Maybe the fact that she was quite casually carrying a meat cleaver had something to do with it.

But I realized that bringing Dominic here hadn't been too smart either. They'd seen us float together and most people knew that Eileen and me had been going steady for the last 18 years, so it was just a case of putting two and two together.

A few old friends dropped in that night and it developed into quite a party and when we finally shoved out the last of them Eileen made up a bed for Dominic in the parlor; but when we woke next morning he'd gone. I was really worried about the kid, until the phone rang about eleven o'clock.

"I'm most grateful for what you did," he said. "But two's company."

"What are you going to do now?" I asked him.

"Take your advice and lie low for a bit," he answered.

"Got any money?" There was a slight pause and then he answered, "Well—some—"

"I've got a bit put by in the old teapot—" I began, but he cut me short.

"Good of you, but I wouldn't hear of it," he said, "although you *could* help me in another way—and do yourself a bit of a favor at the same time."

"How's that?" I asked.

"I painted a picture before my spot of bother," he told me. "It roused quite a bit of interest in art circles and I had several good offers for it. It should be in my new flat, but naturally I don't want to go round there to collect it. Now if you could—"

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"Sure," I said. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"Just hang onto it," he answered. "Maybe a couple of dealers might call on you—I'll phone some of them. It would be up to you then. Stick 'em for as much as you can and I'll split it with you straight down the middle."

"No need for that," I said. "I'd be happy to do it anyhow. You'd better send me a note authorizing me to act for you just in case somebody thinks of doing me for receiving. How much do I ask for it?"

"Leave it to them for openers," he told me. "If they start about the thousand mark you could build on that."

I gulped a bit. I knew he was pretty good with the old brush, but I didn't realize he was in the big-money class. He described the picture to me: a still life of two daffodils and a kipper, he said it was—whatever that might be—20 inches by 12, in a nice new frame. We talked for a bit and he gave me the address and said he'd send me the key together with the note of authorization.

It arrived through the mailbox next morning and I took off for the place after giving anybody who might be tailing me the jolly old runaround in a couple of taxis and a dive down the Tube. The flat was in an old house out Notting Hill way, and I could see as soon as I entered that it had already been well turned over—drawers opened, a mattress slit down one side and the stuffing pulled out, and even the carpets lifted. There were quite a few pictures there—some finished and framed, some unfinished, and some which to my untutored eye looked as if they should never have been started.

I had no difficulty in picking out the one he had mentioned, and a right old daub it was—a petrified fish and two drooping yellow flowers on a bilious-green tablecloth that looked as if it had been painted by a dyspeptic drunk with the blind staggers. I was disappointed. The stuff he'd done in the nick had been real pretty. A vicar's daughter used to come in there and give painting lessons, so I reckoned he must have benefited from that—which shows that no time is ever really wasted even when you're eating porridge. I certainly couldn't imagine anybody in his right mind offering even a quid for it, let alone a thousand. Still, these arty-crafty blokes are a rum mob, and they say that beauty is in the beholder's eye.

I wrapped it up in a torn pillowslip and went off home. Eileen reckoned that the

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picture made her feel like she did on a rough Channel crossing.

The action started early the following morning. There was a ring at the door. It was old Waltenhapper, with Willy in close attendance. Eileen, meat cleaver at the ready, told them to something off—quick—but old W yelled that he had a note from Dominic to say that he could look at "Two Daffodils and a Kipper." I read the note and it was in Dominic's writing all right, so we let them in—Eileen sitting in the corner demurely, feeling the edge of the cleaver absent-mindedly and looking speculatively at a spot right behind Willy's ear'ole. I never saw a man so nervous.

I got the picture out of the bedroom and handed it to Waltenhapper. He grabbed it, stepped across to the window, shoved a jeweler's loupe in his right eye, and studied the thing carefully, concentrating on one corner. Then he turned it over and had a look at the back. The frame, as Dominic had said, was a nice new one—in fact, that was the best part of it.

Waltenhapper took out a small gold knife and nicked the canvas at the back, then gently tore a tiny strip from it. I let out a roar of rage and jumped up and grabbed the picture back from him.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" I yelled. "Damaging property like that. I've a good mind to bash you one."

"Who's damaging?" he said. "I got to satisfy myself, don't I? *Please*—"

He took it back and I could see his hand was trembling quite a bit. I saw what he was studying then. There seemed to be two layers of canvas, the underneath one being old and dirty. He turned it over and looked at the front again, scraped a little of the paint away in one corner, took out a leather case from his pocket and tossed it to Willy, who opened it and wet a bit of cottonwool with some stuff in a glass-stoppered bottle.

Waltenhapper took the cottonwool and wiped the bit he'd scratched very carefully, then studied it again through the loupe. He took a deep breath and turned to me.

"All right—what's he asking?" he said.

"You open," I told him.

He took an even deeper breath, one that seemed to hurt him. "Five," he said.

"Five what?" I asked.

"We aren't talking in millions yet," he answered. "Thousands—what else?"

Eileen dropped the cleaver at that moment and I managed to ride the shock under cover of

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the clatter, so I was quite steady when I looked him in the eye.

"Go take a dive into old Father Thames," I told him, and mustered a really ripe sneer.

"What are you trying to do? Put me through the wringer?" he wailed. "I don't even know if the customer's still in the market." He closed his eyes and moaned faintly. "Ten," he said. "And that's half my commission—*if* the deal goes through—and I'll be taking all the risk."

"Fifteen," said Eileen from her corner. She's fat, but only from the neck down. "Fifteen or we walk away from it. There's others interested."

I was almost sorry for him. He screamed like a cut cat, then covered his face with his hands and wept—and in the end we settled for 12,000, after clearing a further slight misconception. He'd been thinking in dollars, and me in pounds. But I won. Willy opened a largish brief case and started counting—lovely bundles of fifty, and not too new.

I saw them out of the front door, carrying the picture as if it was a time bomb, then I went back to Eileen, staggering slightly. Surprisingly she wasn't very happy about it.

"I could have sworn that kid was straight," she said sadly. "Must have gone bad in the nick. Some of you old bleeders have got a lot to answer for, you know." I gawped at her indignantly, but had the sense not to argue. It doesn't pay when she's in that mood.

Dominic phoned that afternoon and I gave him the glad tidings. He was silent for a moment, then he said, "That's fine. Keep six for yourself and shove six into the account of John Smith, Bank of Western Ireland, will you? That will reach me all right, cover my expenses, and give me a bit of a holiday." Then he hung up.

Eileen and me, we're having a bit of a holiday ourselves. Never mind where. We'll go back to Town when the heat's off a bit—the heat old Waltenhapper whipped up when he found he'd been lumbered with a not very good copy of the Contiverdoso—done on a genuine old canvas by Dominic, then painted over with the daffodil and kipper disaster and sandwiched behind new stuff.

The real one? It was received anonymously by the new Minister for Art and Culture a few days later and is now back in the Gallery—for keeps.

Eileen smiled happily when we got the news, and said she always *knew* the kid was straight.

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a NEW repo-procedural by

JOE GORES

A blow-by-blow procedural as realistic and authentic as a fist in your face... Here's telling it like it is for the specialist detective who investigates frauds and defalcations, recovers delinquent chattels, and skiptraces deadbeats and embezzlers... Follow the trail with Barton Heslip, DKA field agent for nearly four years. "With DKA, it was your knowledge and your cuteness and your toughness against the adversary's... and that's the way Heslip liked it."

FILE NO. 7:
O BLACK AND UNKNOWN BARD

by JOE GORES

Dan Kearny raised flinty gray eyes to the stiff-faced man in front of his desk.

"Well?"

"Hoss, you ain't paying me enough for that."

J. Small laid the Elton T. Lang file on the desk. He had been a field investigator with Daniel Kearny Associates (Head Office, San Francisco, Branch Offices in All Major California Cities) for just three weeks; his name didn't go with his lanky six feet of height. He paused now at the door of Kearny's cubbyhole of an office deep in the basement of the converted Victorian bawdy house.

"Y'all mail my check to my roominghouse, hear?"

Kearny, his square massive-jawed face expressionless, watched the lean Southerner's retreating back through the one-way glass. Kearny's eyes were deep-set, his nose was slightly flattened and bent to give him the appearance of an overage fighter rather than a detective who had spent a quarter of a century investigating frauds and defalcations, recovering delinquent chattels, skiptracing deadbeats, missing relatives, and embezzlers.

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He sighed, then opened the Elton T. Lang repossession file to search for whatever had scared Small off. First report, September 17th: J. Small had "upon recipt of this assignment this date" gone to "the above subject's address but at this time could not make contact." He had returned "to effect repossession" of the subject's 1968 Ford Galaxie in "the early morning hours of 9/18 but to no avail as unit was not on location." Similar reports detailing further Small sorties to 532 Grennan Street, Vallejo, "in the early morning hours to no avail" were dated 9/19, 9/21, 9/24, and 9/27.

That was all, except for a letter from the client, R. Williamson, Vice President of Dixie Fleet Leasing in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, demanding action. Kearny had ordered Small to go talk to people on the case. Apparently he had—only to be scared off somehow.

Kearny's buzzer sounded; Barton Heslip was waiting outside. Heslip was a totally black man, black as the grinning pickaninnies that the movies used to depict with their faces buried in watermelons—but without the "yassah boss." He had been with DKA for nearly four years.

"Small turned belly-up, huh?" To Kearny's raised eyebrows he added, "His company car's parked across the street in the red; meter maid was hanging a ten-buck tag on it when I came in."

Kearny cursed almost absently as he pushed the Lang file across the desk. "This is supposed to be the reason he wandered off."

Heslip buried his wide-flared nose and hairline mustache in the folder. His features were unmarked, even though he had been a professional fighter before coming with DKA; he still trained three days a week.

"Nothing else? He didn't even give you a verbal?"

Kearny, cremating a cigarette, extended the pack to Heslip as he invariably did; Heslip refused, as he invariably did.

"You're looking at what we've got. You'd better cover Vallejo until I can shake one of the Oakland men loose, Bart. And wrap this one up, will you? The client's screaming on it."

Heslip went into his detachable accent. "Lord in hebben, Marse Dan'l, mah high-yaller gal jus' *'spect*in' Ah'm gonna take her to de *talk*ies dis ebenin'. Ah don't do dat, she gwine sell me into slab'ry."

"I'll give her two acres and a mule for you," said Kearny.

Before leaving, Heslip called Corinne at the travel agency

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where she was secretary-receptionist, and hung up rubbing his ear. That Corinne, she just didn't understand that man-hunting was Heslip's profession, the only substitute he'd found for the excitement of the ring. With DKA, it was your knowledge and your cuteness and your toughness against the adversary's. Sometimes he won, usually you won. And that's the way Heslip liked it.

Vallejo without Mare Island Naval Shipyard would be just another sleepy town 40 miles northeast of San Francisco. Because of the shipyard Vallejo's population had exceeded 65,000 and its small, crowded, old-fashioned downtown was being jostled by sprawling subdivisions. The major streets were getting big-townish, sprouting used car lots, trailer parks, and drive-ins.

Heslip found that 532 Grennan was the standard California bungalow on the standard lot in an older, middle-income neighborhood—which meant you could lean against the wall without sticking your elbow through it. A teen-age black girl answered his ring, bringing a murmur of living-room television to the door with her.

"Elton Lang here?" asked Heslip casually.

"You want Senior or The Third? Don't matter *which*, really, 'cause neither of 'em's here. Just me and my homework."

"The young one. He owes me."

Her face closed up. "Like I tole the man yesterday, don't know nothin' 'bout no owing."

But she hadn't shut the door. She had something further to say. The man yesterday. J. Small, finally knocking on the door.

"Elt, he's my cousin," she said, then added almost maliciously, "He got him a girl he been living with. Ain't got her address, but the phone is, um . . . 635-7825."

From a pay phone Heslip called Ma Bell's Vallejo business office to learn that 635-7825 was registered to a Marylee Beatty, 223 Contra Costa Street. This proved to be a new, cheaply constructed apartment building with twelve units and underneath carport parking. No Ford Galaxie. The mailboxes told him Marylee had 2-A. No one home. In 2-B there were two black men drinking beer.

"Elton Lang? Naw, don't know the cat. Know Marylee." He rolled wide eyes bloodshot from too much daytime TV. "Wow, man, that Marylee! Sure, she drove a '68 Ford Galaxie for a week or so. Don't

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no more. Secretary somewheres, that's all I know."

Back at 5:45. Marylee was home, wow indeed, her hair natural, her skirt very mini over lovely honey-brown legs. Even features and severe glasses gave her a schoolteacher look.

"That cousin of Elt's, she hates my—okay, sure, he was staying here for a while. He was broke, in big trouble." She stopped abruptly, face almost scornful. "Hey, how do I know you ain't from the Man?"

Searching for a role Heslip snarled, "Get yo' head together, girl! I *look* like I'm from the Man?"

Apparently he didn't. She said, "*You* people ought to know where he is better than me." Her eyes suddenly troubled, she added, almost to herself, "Made his choice, made it plain to me." She raised her still-scornful face to Heslip. "You still here? Maybe his sister knows. Over in the projects, 1122 Monterey Street."

"Right on." Heslip added casually, "That honkey cat was around yesterday, you send him over to the sister's, too?"

"I sent *him* down to Headquarters."

Headquarters. Of what? What did she assume Heslip was part of, for which she despised him? What had Small run into, apparently at Headquarters, heavy enough to scare him off so completely?

Maybe the sister knew.

He got no response at 1122 Monterey, so he knocked at 1120 as the street lights went on behind him. A black woman in her fifties opened the door. She was tall and lean and stooped, with a grayness of recent illness laid like dead ash over her brown skin. Her hair was white and kinky.

"They all out next door, it's my boy's place, he's married to Elt's sister. Helene. But Elt ain't living there anyways; staying with a friend name of Wilson, some such, out to Flora Terrace." A fairly new subdivision north of town by the municipal golf course, Heslip knew. The woman was slanting a look at him from the corner of her eye. " 'Course you ain't just *said* what you want with Elt . . ."

Her voice slid off. The stew bubbling richly on the gas stove behind her was a tangible presence in the apartment.

"I'm here to repossess the Galaxie. He owes on it."

"Mmmmph." Nothing showed in her face. Some time went by. She said, "How come you put down a man of your own color this way?"

"Color doesn't mean you don't pay your bills, Mama."

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"Bills don't mean you go arrestin' a boy like Elt, neither."

The story, told over bowls of incredible beef-hock stew, was taken up halfway through by the subject's sister, Helene, after arriving with groceries.

Elton T. (for Truscott) Lang had been attending Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, majoring in English and working nights and weekends as a mechanic for Dixie Leasing. When he'd wanted a car following his graduation, he'd financed one of Dixie's used lease cars through them. Then he'd decided to come to California and live with his grandparents on Grennan Street while writing the Great American Black Novel.

"Nothin' for that boy," said Helene, "except pickin' away at that typewriter. Moved in with us 'cause Granny couldn't take it, all hours of the day an' night. Me it didn't bother any."

"Did he tell Dixie Leasing he was taking the car from Louisiana?"

"No." Eyes that rivaled Lena Horne's dominated Helene's pinched, almost simian face. "But he tole them a month after he got here. Called 'em long distance from my phone, nineteen dollars' worth. He wanted to register the car in California—"

"And Williamson demanded a payoff," Heslip supplied. It was standard procedure: by forcing a local refinance arrangement, the original lien holder was assured of getting his money.

"Thirteen hundred dollars he wanted—gave Elt twelve hours to raise it. Never did hold with Elt's college, jus' wanted him to stay there as a mechanic. Elt, he offered to make *double* payments, would of paid off the note in nine months. But Mr. Williamson, he said he was gonna get him a warrant."

"And he *did?*" Heslip was astounded. In four years he had never heard of a dealer really going for Grand Theft. Helene was nodding.

"Two days later here comes the F.B.I. busting right into my living room where Elt was sleeping on the sofa, and they clapped the handcuffs on him right in my house, and took him off to Municipal Court. Illegal Flight to Avoid Persecution, they said—something like that. Our Granny, she put up her house as surety for the bailbond man."

"How long ago did this happen?"

" 'Bout a month. Elt, he changed after that. First he quit bangin' that typewriter, then he moved over to that Marylee's place, then out to that Wilson's

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place in Flora Terrace. We just got the phone number out there, not the address." Distress twisted her face, but Heslip was untouched. You got involved, you didn't do your job right. "They gonna make Elt go back to Louisiana even if you take his car away?"

"Of course not," said Heslip with an assurance he didn't feel. "All-Dixie Leasing wants is the car."

Helene took him next door for the probably worthless phone number. Flora Terrace had garages, so he couldn't just cruise to spot the car.

"Could he have written the address down anywhere?"

Helene chewed her lip for a moment, then led him down the hall. "If he did, it'd be in here. I ain't moved anything since he left."

Project housing doesn't run to elegance. The room was small, furnished with a broken down cot, neatly made, a table and chair. On the table was a dusty typewriter and a pile of manuscript. Taped to the wall was a verse.

O black and unknown
bards of long ago
How came your lips to
touch the sacred fire?
How, in your darkness, did
you come to know
The power and beauty of
the minstrel's lyre?

Unexpectedly, the lines touched Heslip. He reread them, then shrugged them off almost irritably and returned to his search. No memo pad on the table or in its single drawer, no address book. Heslip pawed briefly through the manuscripts; the top one was different from the rest.

As-Salaam-Alaikum, Beloved Brothers and Sisters of the Simba Black People's Party:

It is time that you became aware of the unjust treatment given a fellow Black in the struggle against this devilish pig society. On August 27, Black Brother Elton T. Lang was illegally arrested by the Federal pigs. The People's Revolution cannot

Heslip read it through, ebony face expressionless, then folded it and stuck it in his pocket. Lang's sister might not have seen it. He also drove downtown before returning to San Francisco for the night. The Simba Black People's Party Headquarters were on a littered side street near the Greyhound Station, a storefront building with boarded-up windows and no lights showing. No 1968 Galaxie in sight, either.

The next morning Heslip

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called Williamson in Baton Rouge. "It would make my job a lot easier if that warrant was vacated," Heslip explained. "The way it is now—"

"I don't understand your concern over this Nigra's well-being," said Williamson coldly. He had a heavy Southern drawl that Heslip didn't like.

"Some of my best friends are whites."

"What? You mean that *you're* a—" Williamson paused. "Very well. "I'll—ah—ask our lawyer to withdraw the complaint."

"I don't think one would want to marry his daughter," said Heslip after reporting the conversation to Kearny. "At least not this one."

"Our concern is the car," said Kearny sharply. "*Just* the car."

By 10:30 a.m. Heslip was in Vallejo and had learned from Ma Bell that Wilson's phone in Flora Terrace was unlisted. What he had expected. That left Simba Headquarters, the staging area for the black power radicals who talked incessantly about black pride, who wore quasi-military uniforms and snappy berets, and who ran around with carbines and rifles.

Not for Heslip. In the ring, that stud was there to whup your butt, just as you were there to whup his. Didn't matter what color that butt happened to be. Heslip was proud of *him*. Being black was an integral part of being Bart Heslip; but it wasn't the *source* of that pride. *He* was. He himself. Too bad it wasn't that way for Lang.

He got out of the company car and crossed the street. The Simba Black People's Party Headquarters didn't look any better by daylight than it had by night. A narrow storefront building, with a defunct record shop on one side and a boarded-up warehouse with double doors on the other. Passing the warehouse, Heslip checked suddenly, then went on, grinning to himself. Cool, man. Should have guessed.

Headquarters were so underfurnished as to be nearly barren. Straight ahead was a curtained partition to divide the single long room into a public front section and a private rear one. From behind the partition came male voices and the smell of coffee. In front of it was a bookshelf of unplaned pine boards bearing piles of revolutionary newspapers, including the *Simba Community News*.

To the left was a battered wooden desk with a plump black teen-age girl behind it, a pencil in her Afro-cut hair. Her round, vacant, thick-lipped face

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was intent as she hunt-and-pecked envelopes slower than she could have hand-lettered them.

"What you want, Brother?"

Heslip jerked his head at the curtain. "Elton Lang, Sister."

"You ain't a Simba?" When Heslip just shook his head, so did she. "Then you cain't talk to him, man."

Before Heslip could argue, the curtain parted and a man sauntered out. To merely call him a man was to call a battleship a boat. He stood an easy six foot six, and wore G.I. fatigue pants under a violent purple shirt stretched skin-tight by tremendous blocky weight-lifter shoulders. He outweighed Heslip's 158 by 100 pounds.

"You heard the Sister," he said. His face was a block of black granite scarred on one side by an ancient knife fight and decorated with a nose that had nothing left to fear from club or bottle. "Simbas only here, jes' like I tole the honkey cat I run off yesterday."

No wonder Small had split after running into this stud. But Heslip didn't move. The giant's head sank down between yard-wide shoulders; his breath abruptly began to hiss between his teeth. The girl was staring at him so raptly that her mouth was hanging open.

At the last possible moment Heslip said, "I'll be across the street. On city property."

Which left purple-shirt nothing to attack but a back already retreating. Across the street Heslip leaned against his fender, arms folded, and waited. He had a hunch it wouldn't be long. It wasn't. Ten minutes later a slim young black man in slacks and sports shirt came out of Headquarters alone. He had a handsome angry face, even-featured, with high cheekbones and his sister's huge melting eyes. Right now they snapped with scorn.

"Helene *said* some Tom wanted to take my car away from me."

Heslip just laughed. "You jiving like this because you got busted? Man, *I'm* blacker than you—but I pay my bills."

"Sure, you're a good Tom," said the boy bitterly. "You—"

" 'O black and unknown bard,' " quoted Heslip softly, " 'How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?' "

The boy went into a furious crouch like an angry Doberman and cursed him, bitterly, foully, but Heslip didn't even unfold his arms. He merely craned forward, as if examining a rare exotic animal.

"What you, boy, some kind of writer or something? Or you just a talker?"

Lang drew a deep ragged

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breath and straightened up. Good stuff in him, Heslip had to admit. Only the shakiness of his voice betrayed him.

"You through?" Then he blew it. He yelled, "We Simbas are *men! Black* men, ready to fight and die for freedom *now!* You're a corrupted traitorous counter-revolutionary who's sold out to the racist pigs!"

"Because I work for a living?"

The boy threw two more words at him, then stalked off stiffly across the street. Heslip got into the company car. His hands were shaking. Then his face lost its sullen ferocity and he chuckled. Hell, baby, you make them play your game in this business. He'd shook the boy up good, and if the Simbas ran true to form—

Yeah, man. Four of them, all there were in the building, he hoped. Lang. Purple-shirt—probably Wilson—and two others wearing fatigue jackets and berets. No guns. They all got into an old Chevy panel truck at the curb, very carefully not seeing Heslip.

The truck pulled away; when it was nearly to the corner, Heslip U-turned to fall in well behind. It swung north, through town. Toward the Flora Terrace subdivision where Lang and Wilson lived—where the Galaxie might reasonably be.

But the instant the truck made the turn out of sight, Heslip pulled over quickly, was out of his car with his repossession order in one pocket and pop keys, window picks, and jump wires in another. It was a matter of minutes now, possibly just seconds.

Item: they'd wanted him to follow, wanted to lead him away.

Item: four was the ideal number for stomping somebody who unsuspectingly followed a panel truck to a garage where there wasn't any Galaxie after all.

Item: the warehouse double doors were barred on the inside, and were wide enough to admit a full-size sedan. A Galaxie, say.

Item: Heslip had seen treadmarks across the curb and sidewalk in front of the doors when he had first walked by.

Now if the Simbas would just take several minutes to realize that he wasn't behind them and if the vacant-faced girl now (hopefully) alone in Simba Headquarters was as dumb as she looked—

He was halfway to the partition before the pudgy receptionist had found enough of her wits to start up behind her desk, yelling.

"Hey, you, Simbas only! What—"

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A groove, man. A girl yelling couldn't be phoning for help. He was through the partition—no one there!—past the triple hotplate and wisping coffee pot. Yes! The door in the right-hand wall *did* open into the warehouse. Unlocked. If—

The Galaxie was there. Yellow in color. Louisiana plates. Doors—*unlocked!* Keys—*in it!* Heslip ran to the big double doors, flipped aside the two-by-four barring them, violently shoved, and they swung open, wide.

"Damn you, *stop!* You can't—"

No brains, that girl, but nothing wrong with her lungs.

Heslip was into the Galaxie as the girl came around the front of it, his eyes already confirming the last four digits of the motor number on the doorpost, solid man, a groove, right on, he was pumping the foot feed, twisting the key.

It started instantly, he floored it, out it went, back end slewing, horn yelping under his hand, right out through the doors and across the sidewalk as the girl leaped aside like an out-of-condition matador. Heslip slammed the wheel hard over, left, taking the car in the opposite direction from the panel truck. One eye on the mirror, the other on the street on which he was traveling too fast. No time to call the repo in to the cops, not now; get to the freeway and out of town.

Hot damn! He pounded the steering wheel in elation. Try that on your Simba rhetoric, baby.

But sixty-fiving south on Interstate 80, Heslip felt his triumph evaporate. He had got the car in the only way possible, short of sheriff's replevin; Williamson would be delighted and Kearny might even act pleased. And yet—

Elton T. Lang was going to be pushed further into the revolutionaries' control. Further from his family and Marylee, further from his dream of being a black Hemingway.

To hell with it, Heslip thought as he started across the bridge spanning the Carquinez Straits. Not his problem. He checked the mirror and saw a highway patrol car far behind him. Had to report the repossession to the police by phone from Richmond or somewhere.

The black-and-white was coming up fast, red lights flashing, so Heslip pulled into the middle lane. Man, they were in some kind of a hurry. Must have got a hot one on the radio.

The patrol car hit the middle lane, too. Okay, cats, the slow lane to let you by.

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The patrol car switched.

After *him*, for God's sake? Damn! Should have phoned from Vallejo. But who would have thought the Simbas would have reported it as stolen? A grim irony there.

As he got out of the Galaxie to walk back to the cruiser, the driver, out first, threw down on him. Heslip froze; the muzzle of the .38 looked as big as the rain barrel under the eaves of the old farmhouse where he had been born back in Missouri.

"Okay, hands on the car, feet back and spread, lean forward. *Move!*"

Heslip moved, rage boiling up as rough hands frisked him. He began to speak, but the cop cut him off.

"Just get that right hand on top of the head, Lang." Cuffs bit coldly at his wrist. "Now the left hand on—"

"Dammit, *NOT* Lang!" Heslip shouted, finally breaking through their ritual. "Barton Heslip, with Daniel Kearny Associates of San Francisco. I repossessed this vehicle in Vallejo twenty minutes ago."

That stopped it. He showed them his driver's license, private investigator's registration card, and the repossession order on the Galaxie. The older patrolman, who had a hard tanned face with a white band around his forehead marking where his cap covered, abruptly removed the cuffs.

"We're—er—sorry, Mr. Heslip. Spotted the car on the hot sheet, saw a black man driving, assumed—"

"We all look alike to you?" snapped Heslip, rubbing his wrist. "Okay, not your fault. That damned F.B.I. Flight to Avoid warrant was supposed to have been killed this morning. It—"

The older patrolman had returned to the cruiser; the younger one was frowning. "We got it as Grand Theft against Lang. A Louisiana warrant, teletyped out just today."

Williamson had sent out the warrant *after* talking to Heslip! He apparently didn't like blacks, not even when they were doing his work for him. Damn him. If that cat wanted to push, Heslip would push back.

The other patrolman returned from running Heslip through CLETS—the new California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System. His face said the detective was clean.

"Since you represent the vehicle's legal owner we have no further cause to detain you. Or the vehicle. I hope you will accept our apologies for any inconvenience—"

"Part of the game," said

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Heslip. Then he added casually, "But you *will* get the Galaxie off the hot sheet, won't you? I don't want to get stopped by every patrol unit between here and San Francisco."

They assured him the car would be cleared through the CLETS network, the three men shook hands, and returned to their respective cars. Heslip used the Rodeo turnoff to get back on Interstate 80 north—back toward Vallejo. Kearny was going to flip if he ever heard about this little maneuver, because Heslip stood a good chance of losing the car again. Or of getting beat up. Or both. It went against all his own carefully ingrained professional habits, too: but there was a chance. Lang had wavered there for a moment.

The four Simbas were gathered on the sidewalk in front of the still-gaping double doors when Heslip stopped the yellow Galaxie across the street. As he got out they saw him and came at him fast, Lang and purple-shirt in the lead.

"Oh, baby," crooned the giant, "did you mess it up!"

"Did I?" Heslip's voice was nonchalant, as was his pose against the car's fender; but his guts were churning. Well, use your fear, use the adrenalin it pumped into your bloodstream, use your heightened perceptions and quickened pulse and sharpened reflexes.

"Why did you come back?" yelped Lang in a frightened voice.

Yeah, man! Scared of what the others would do to Heslip.

"Why, to get a driver to take my car back to the city, of course," he said as if surprised at the question. "Want the job? I'm getting all the charges against you dropped, so—"

"Man, you really too stupid to know what's gonna happen to you?" demanded purple-shirt.

They were poised, set on a knife-edge. They could go either way. And then purple-shirt made his move.

"*Hai!*" he yelled, flicking the karate chop known as the backhand lash at Heslip's neck.

A few hours of hand-to-hand combat instruction, however, don't make any amateur the equal of a professional fighter; and Heslip had won 39 out of 40 career fights.

As the plank-like rigid hand exploded toward him, he just wasn't there any more. He came off the car to his own left, pivoting so the hand would whoosh harmlessly past his shoulder, countering while purple-shirted Wilson was still at full stretch, off balance, moving into it.

Heslip, spurred by fear, had

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never hit anyone harder. His fist, thumb down and knuckles parallel to the ground, caught Wilson right in the throat. No knuckles would be broken that way.

The huge man went backward and sideways right across the hood of the Galaxie as if struck by a .45 slug. He landed on one shoulder in the grease-rimed street with a sickening crack of breaking bone, rolled over once, tried to get up once, sprawled on his face. A sound like escaping steam came from him, the closest thing to a scream his larynx was capable of producing.

"Any other takers?" asked Heslip in a terrible soft voice that robbed the question of theatricality.

No takers. The other two Simbas were nothing, ciphers, they didn't exist. Him against me, his knowledge and his cuteness and his toughness against mine. Purple-shirt hadn't had enough of any of them.

"You coming, kid?"

Lang turned a stunned, blinded face toward him.

"Here's the keys." To Lang's own car. If it was going to work, it would work all the way. "Meet me at Golden Gate and Gough in the city. Got that?"

"Gol-Golden Gate—"

"Good man. Driver's fee is ten bucks plus a bus ticket back."

He walked to his company car without a backward glance.

"You *what*?" roared Dan Kearny.

Heslip had told his story. He shrugged almost sullenly. "The car's in the barn, isn't it? It worked. And I'll tell you something else, Dan. I'm gonna call that guy in Baton Rouge and tell him I've got his car and I'm gonna hold it until those warrants are voided, and he isn't gonna get a payoff or any bids until—"

Kearny had stood up; he inclined abruptly across the desk so that his heavy blunt features were a scant six inches away from Heslip's face.

"*I* will call the client, Mr. Heslip, and I will tell him what I feel is in the best interests of DKA, and nothing more. Got that?"

"I—"

"Got that, Mr. Heslip?"

"I—yes, sir."

But in his cubicle, after he had racheted a report form into his typewriter, Heslip found himself unable to type. Dammit, Kearny was *wrong*. Lang thought the warrants had been cleared, and—

Kearny's phone extension

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had lighted up. Probably calling Williamson. Business as usual, Heslip thought bitterly. As if by its own volition his hand snaked out to jab the lighted button, then lightly and guardedly lifted the receiver. Kearny was in mid-speech.

"... surprised at your attorney's action, Mr. Williamson. I know that *you* would never have any part in hounding that poor black boy, but even so, Dixie Leasing has been laid open for a civil rights suit. I *think* our man Heslip has gotten Lang to drop the Criminal Persecution charges he was going to file, but—"

Almost reverently Heslip slipped the receiver back into place. Beautiful, man. Walk all over Heslip for getting out of line, then call up Williamson and make him swallow what Heslip had wanted. Take him right down to the nitty-gritty without ever quite pushing his embarrassment to anger. Yeah, man! Bart Heslip still had a lot to learn.

Meanwhile Dan Kearny was one sweet cat to work for. The black field agent began typing reports, whistling softly through his teeth.

In his cubbyhole Kearny had finished his conversation. Years back, he remembered, he'd called a client himself because he was sore about something. Just as Heslip had wanted to do. They'd lost the account, and Old Man Walters had racked him up but good.

His mouth quirked at the corners. Bart had listened in, of course; Kearny had heard the receiver being raised. Good. The kid was learning the detective's basic maxim: never trust anyone entirely, not even yourself, because just being human made you full of surprises.

Kearny shook a cigarette from his pack and dragged over a stack of files due for review. The top one was labeled Elton T. Lang. He tossed it into the CLOSED bin. When the final field report and the auto condition report came in, he could bill that one out.

"O"

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James Fitzpatrick's first story appeared in Volume 8 (1968) of "December" magazine. The story you are about to read is Mr. Fitzpatrick's second, and we almost wish it were his first—what a notable and distinguished "first story" it would be!

But first or second, it is a privilege to bring you "What Hedgepeth Heard," the story of an ex-Army man who hated to be out of step and a night jogger who became a signal. A curiously haunting story, "What Hedgepeth Heard" will gnaw or nibble its way under your skin—and stay there. . .

WHAT HEDGEPETH HEARD

by JAMES FITZPATRICK

David Hedgepeth's adult life began in chaos and was threatening to get worse when the Army rescued him.

At the age of 24 he was sharing a small room in a *pension* at 34 Konigsplaza, Amsterdam, with an Austrian girl named Trudi, whom he had found hitchhiking from The Hague when he labored past her on his motorscooter. He had planned to find a job and in the evenings live like Spinoza, meditating on the timeless problems of philosophy; but the sheets always smelled of beer, Trudi knew nothing of deodorants, and he missed the American breakfasts of orange juice, bacon, and eggs.

His general unhappiness inspired an unaccustomed passion in him, and for a while he thought he might have the makings of a poet. But his crisp passion would turn sodden even as he walked across the gray, misty square, carrying his clean notebook to the sidewalk café, and he would think—with a mixture of resentment and pride—that Trudi could not possibly survive his leaving her.

He sighed a lot, swallowed much air, often had hiccups and heartburn, until the fortunate day he was ordered to report

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back to the States for induction into the Army. He was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, where he learned the peaceful pleasures of standing in line.

He learned to like slogging along at 120 steps a minute with his eyes on the neck of the man in front of him. He even liked to shuffle forward a foot at a time in the long waits for meals. Best of all he liked parades, which combined the pleasures of waiting in line with those of following the leader.

He liked platoon calisthenics, truck convoys, and the predictability of messhall food. He liked to salute; he liked the plain and visible hierarchy that permitted no confusion about personal worth. Five stripes were always better than four, four always better than three.

When he received his discharge at Ford Ord after two years, he was skeptical of his ability to survive as a civilian. On the long bus ride east through Winnemucca, Cheyenne, Omaha, Iowa City, and Aurora, he saw an undisciplined, disorganized country. As soon as he was settled in Chicago he joined the police force. He did well enough in the academy and shined at station-house inspections, but he fell apart out on patrol when he was in uniform but alone.

Next he became a bank teller and spent his evenings in a Near North Side tavern, where one night he said to the guy on the next barstool, a clerk for an airlines ticket office, "I think I'm getting out of step."

"How's that?" asked his friend.

"Everyone else my age has gotten married."

They both stared at their beers and sighed, but after a moment Hedgepeth straightened his shoulders and said, "I sure hate to be out of step."

Late the next Friday evening Hedgepeth—reckless after a long day and a light supper of beer and potato chips—cut a straggler away from her pack of girl friends at the bar. Her name was Stephanie. Her ankles hurt and she was hungry. Hedgepeth drove her to Chinatown, bought her supper, and told her, over tea, about his feeling of being out of step.

"I know exactly what you mean," said Stephanie, who had already been a bridesmaid to her younger sister.

Six weeks later they were married in the County Building. At the end of the short ceremony, instead of kissing the bride, Hedgepeth saluted the judge. Fortunately the old man had already ducked behind the pages of the late edition of the *Tribune*. Hedgepeth lowered his hand uncertainly and looked

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down at Stephanie, whose clear upturned face was glowing with anticipation. Hedgepeth kissed her gratefully.

"Why did you salute him?" asked Stephanie as they pushed through the revolving doors onto Clark Street.

"I don't know. I guess I thought I was back in the Army."

When they had got a cab and were northbound over the river, Hedgepeth frowned, looked sharply at his bride, and said, "Don't get me wrong. I liked the Army." She smiled, and Hedgepeth thought that he had never seen anything as friendly and reassuring as her smile. "But I like you a lot more," he told her in a tone of wonder at his own good fortune.

They rented an apartment on Elm Street in Evanston, just two blocks from the lake. Every morning Hedgepeth stood patiently in line for the train into the city. He bought two suits, one a very dark blue and the other a very dark brown. They looked so much alike that he could interchange the trousers without anyone noticing.

On weekends he and Stephanie walked in the park along the lake among the springtime lovers and athletes. The air was rich with the smell of lilac blossoms and charcoal fires. The paths were full of bicycles. Students from Northwestern sailed frisbies over the bright lawns. Once, following the fruity notes of a tuba across the park toward the university, they came upon a thin young man in horn-rimmed glasses solemnly sitting on a bench beneath a crabapple tree; he was clasping a shiny tuba to his chest and playing from sheet music clipped to a golden tripod.

One warm evening as they sat on the rocks that formed the shoreline at the foot of Elm Street, they heard a curious slapping sound and turned to see a man in a white sweatsuit and gym shoes running toward them down the center of the street. They looked away as he jogged past them on his way around the park, but turned again to watch him run back up Elm Street.

He passed their apartment every night at about 11:00. They could plainly hear his gym shoes slapping the street—first, as he ran east toward the lake and again, five minutes later, as he ran west on his way home. On the rare occasions that he didn't appear, they pretended to worry about his health; but obviously it was good enough for him to run in the worst of weather.

Returning from a movie one cold night in January they saw

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him pass, trailing plumes of steam from his gaping mouth. And on a rainy Friday night in March, as Hedgepeth and Stephanie walked home under a large black umbrella, the jogger burst out from an alley between two apartment buildings on Elm and bounded past them like a flushed rabbit.

They celebrated the first anniversary of their wedding in an Italian restaurant below the Michigan Avenue bridge in Chicago. While waiting for a table they sat on black-leather stools at the bar and toasted each other with martinis. Glancing in the mirror Hedgepeth caught sight of his wife beside him, bright and pretty in her scoop-necked orange dress.

"Why are you smiling?" she asked.

"I'm proud to be seen with you," he replied.

At dinner they had a bottle of Orvieto, chilled in a bucket of ice, with their chicken à la Kiev. After dinner they congratulated each other over snifters of orange-flavored brandy. When Hedgepeth rose to go to the washroom, his head felt packed with cotton and his stomach lined with slag. He sat down again and looked disapprovingly at Stephanie, who was slumped in her chair and seemed to be leering at him.

"I think I'm drunk," she said.

As they were driving back to Evanston along the Outer Drive she roused herself and asked suddenly, "We aren't going home already, are we?"

"I thought you were drunk."

"Don't you like drunks?"

He set his jaw firmly and kept his eyes on the road. Back home, as she stepped out of her dress, she said, "You didn't answer my question."

Hedgepeth carried his trousers to the closet and arranged them carefully on a hanger. Stephanie marched into the kitchen and returned with a can of beer.

"This is something new," said Hedgepeth indignantly.

She lay down on the bed, spilling beer on the sheet, looked up at him and winked.

"If I wanted to sleep on sheets that smelled of beer I would have stayed in Amsterdam," he said. He went out to the living room with a heavy, unhappy face and sat on the couch, dangling his arms between his knees. When he heard the sound of the jogger going east, he straightened up and told himself that old soldiers can sleep anywhere. He pulled two blankets from a closet, settled himself on the couch, and waited. When he heard the sound of the jogger going back west, he fell asleep.

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It was the beginning of a bad year for them. On weekends Hedgepeth went out in sneakers alone with an illustrated manual to identify birds in the forest preserve. In the evenings he felt heavy and useless in the apartment and gratefully put himself to bed at 10:45, a few minutes before the jogger came out. Within a few weeks he was getting into bed every night in time to turn off the bedside lamp just before the jogger ran by on his way to the lake. Five minutes later, when he heard the jogger going back, he would fall asleep.

One hot night at the end of summer, as Hedgepeth was plodding toward his side of the bed like a white, water-filled balloon, Stephanie said, "David, you should get some exercise."

"Like the jogger, you mean?" he snapped with considerably more heat than her words warranted. That night the jogger's feet beat on the pavement outside with a heavy, manly force that reminded Hedgepeth of a platoon sergeant's booted walk through a barracks after lights out. Hedgepeth docilely fell asleep.

There were some tender moments between them, particularly in the dark. There were nights when the pleasures of reconciliation were strong enough to make Hedgepeth forget to listen for the jogger; but in the morning light he would withdraw guiltily into himself and communicate with his wife in reluctant monosyllables.

Their second anniversary passed without celebration. A few nights later, after the jogger had run east and Hedgepeth had turned out the light, Stephanie clutched his arm and said, "I might be pregnant, David."

Hedgepeth's breath went cold.

"David, I'll find out for sure tomorrow when I see the doctor. He gave me some tests last week."

"What did he think last week?"

"He thought I was pregnant."

Hedgepeth breathed very carefully, as if he were already afraid of awakening turbulent passions in the child.

The jogger did not return that night, and Hedgepeth could not fall asleep. At 5:00, when the light from the east had sufficiently brightened the window shade beside the bed, Hedgepeth pulled on a pair of trousers, broke out a fresh white shirt that he would wear to work in a couple of hours, and went out without wakening Stephanie.

He walked east on Elm to the park and along the lake past

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lilac trees in full fragrant bloom and rosy-white crabapple trees until he came to a low cyclone fence, which he followed back toward Sheridan Road where it ended at the sidewalk. In the soft dirt beside the fence pole he saw the unmistakable print of the sole of a gym shoe.

He followed the tracks along the fence down to the shore, which at this point was buttressed with a row of iron pilings driven down level with the grass. There was no beach here, and no barrier to keep one from stepping or running off into eight feet of cold dark water.

Walking back away from the water, Hedgepeth found himself in a sumptuously grand formal garden. A row of short spruce trees, alternately green and blue, stood behind a reflecting pool, which was flanked by silvery, sculptured juniper shrubs. Long rows of low privet, broken occasionally by concrete benches, bordered stone-covered walks that performed abstract exercises out in the open around the pool and then back past lemon-colored sprays of forsythia and on to a grove of plum trees.

Hedgepeth sniffed the morning air and aimed himself toward the flowering plums, thinking that if he were a runner and healthy he might now and then succumb to a place like this and carry a sleeping bag. An avid grin lifted his cheeks as he pictured himself waking the sleeping jogger saying, "I was worried when you didn't come back."

But Hedgepeth stopped so short that he tasted his front teeth as a large, lean, brown-and-black Doberman pinscher bounded in front of him and stood up on its hind legs, waving his paws and his snout inches from Hedgepeth's face.

"This is private property, mister," said a tired youthful voice from beneath a maple tree. "Where do you think you're going?"

Hedgepeth, staring at the dog's black nose, didn't trust himself to speak.

"Come here, Duke!" commanded the tired voice, and the dog mercifully lowered his muscular body.

Hedgepeth turned and cast a heavy look of reproach at his tormentor beneath the tree, who turned out to be a fat boy of perhaps 17 wearing faded blue jeans covered with multicolored patches and a souvenir T-shirt of Mount Rushmore.

"I was looking for a friend," said Hedgepeth.

"Who?" said the boy.

"A runner. Jogger."

"So why are you looking on our grounds?"

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"He came in here," said Hedgepeth boldly.

"You're out of your skull!" snarled the boy. Then in a slow heavy voice he said, "You better go home, mister."

Hedgepeth left. He went home for his tie and coat and walked over to South Boulevard to catch the train into the city. All day long his head buzzed with fatigue. The more he questioned himself, the less sure he was of whether or not the boy had been wearing gym shoes.

That night at 11:00 Hedgepeth lay stiffly in bed with the light on, wondering how long it would take him to adjust to falling asleep without a signal from the jogger. His wife interrupted his sad reverie.

"David?" she said.

"Hmm?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Hmm."

Fifteen minutes passed without either of them moving. When Stephanie finally asked him to turn off the light he realized it would be the first time in a year that he would do it without simultaneously hearing the jogger. His sinuses swelled with self-pity, and he furiously massaged his nose with his fist. But the light went out. An hour later Stephanie sighed.

"Stephanie, you awake?" His voice sounded plaintive in the still room.

"Yes, David. Can't you sleep either?"

Hedgepeth reached over and took her hand. It felt sturdy and competent, and he decided to share his burden.

"Stephanie, do you remember the guy we used to see jogging out here on Elm?"

"Yes," she said softly.

"I listen for him every night."

"I know."

"Well, last night he ran east, but I never heard him come back. Tonight I haven't heard him at all."

"Hmm."

This indifference of hers annoyed him, and he was already struggling with his temper as he asked, "You haven't heard him tonight, have you?"

"Oh, David," she said. "I don't know. I don't pay attention to all the things that you do."

Very carefully he disengaged his hand from hers and wiped it across the sheets to erase the lingering sensation of her touch. Anger sat heavily on his chest, and he had to turn over to breathe. He thought he had never seen such insensitivity in a fellow human being. He was too wrought up to lie still. He got up, furiously explaining,

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"You make a bed impossible to sleep in."

Hedgepeth spent the night at the kitchen table, sleeping in fits and starts. At 5:00 he went out and posted himself in front of the alley between the two apartment buildings, the alley from which he and Stephanie had seen the jogger emerge on that rainy night some 14 months before. Hedgepeth hoped to spot his man leaving for work, but he waited three hours without success.

That night at 10:00, as Stephanie was tearing a recipe from the *Daily News*, Hedgepeth left to post himself again. At 11:00 he walked the half mile east to the park and looked for the jogger among the thorny hawthorns and beneath the dark red maples. His reluctance to face the dog again kept him a respectful distance from the cyclone fence.

When he returned home and entered the bedroom, Stephanie switched on the light and looked at the clock. It was almost 1:00 in the morning.

"Where have you been, David?" she asked coolly.

"Out looking for the jogger," he answered casually.

"Oh, David! Why is that so important?"

In a voice that trembled even as he tried to keep it judiciously deliberate, Hedgepeth said, "You're a cold and insensitive woman, Stephanie."

She threw back the covers, stood up, and said, "What's come over you? I don't understand this."

Hedgepeth stared at her flushed, exasperated face and thought that for the first time he really understood her. If only he had known in time! Never would he have married a woman as coarse and mean-spirited as this. "Me?" he said archly. "What's come over *me*? I'm the same as I've always been. It's you who've changed, Stephanie."

"Why?" she demanded. "Just because I don't want us to quarrel over—over the sound of gym shoes that you don't hear any more?"

"I'm sorry, Stephanie, but I can't share a bed with someone who winks at murder."

"Oh, David, you're insane!"

"I mean it, Stephanie. One of us will sleep on the couch tonight. If you won't, I will. Which is it to be?" he asked portentously.

"David, I'm almost a mother."

"You sure know how to strike a self-important pose, Stephanie. *I'll* sleep on the couch."

So the couch became Hedgepeth's bed, but he didn't spend much time in it. Between 10:00

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and 2:00 the next night he walked the streets, systematically covering a one-square-mile grid, on the chance that his jogger was using a new route. After that walk of more than 15 miles Hedgepeth had to drug himself to sleep with a handful of aspirin.

The next morning he got up nearly lame with severe shin splints and badly strained muscles in his right foot. That night he hobbled down to the park and spent the four hours between 10:00 and 2:00 sitting on a bench and staring at the lake.

In the days that followed, Hedgepeth showed an obsessed man's talent for exhausting a subject without learning anything. He called the Chamber of Commerce and asked for the names of any jogging clubs. He inquired at the two large hospitals in the city whether they had treated anyone recently who had injured himself while jogging. He called the police and asked if anyone had been maimed or murdered in Elm Street Park. He hung up when they asked for his name.

His shin splints and strained muscles cured themselves in a week, but when Hedgepeth was again able to resume his strenuous searching he found himself wandering aimlessly, feeling sorry for himself. One Sunday afternoon he noticed that the lemon-yellow sprays of forsythia that had so brightened the shrubbery along his walks had all disappeared for the season. He thought then that it made no more sense to look for the jogger than it would make sense to try to bring back the forsythia blossoms. Only his prideful reluctance to be reconciled with his wife kept him from giving up the search entirely.

Early the next morning, while he was walking in the park, the fat boy in the Mount Rushmore T-shirt called to him.

"You still looking for your friend?"

Hedgepeth froze, expecting to have the dog at his throat at any moment; but the boy came around the fence alone and walked up to Hedgepeth saying, "Do you still want to look in here?"

"Well . . . ah," stammered Hedgepeth. "I don't—" he began.

"Come on!" The boy took Hedgepeth by the arm in a surprisingly powerful grip. Hedgepeth, concealing his pain as the boy's fingers threatened to separate his biceps from his humerus, followed along docilely. "I live here," said the boy. "What do you think of it?" He gestured toward the baronial mansion of brown brick.

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"An imposing edifice," said Hedgepeth, anxious not to displease.

"It stinks," said the boy. "I'm leaving it. This week, I think. Maybe today. Well, what do you want to see?" Releasing his grip on Hedgepeth the boy spread his arms to indicate the whole estate from the lake to Sheridan Road.

"I really didn't have anything specific in mind," said Hedgepeth.

"You probably want to know where your friend was running, right?"

"Well—" said Hedgepeth.

"What was he like?"

"Like?"

"Yeah. What kind of a guy was he?"

"I didn't know him very well," said Hedgepeth.

"Damn!" said the boy, slamming his palm against the trunk of a buckeye tree. He looked at his hand resting on the tree and spoke to it as if it were a person. "He can't even tell me if his friend was quiet or loud, a jerk or a nice guy."

Hedgepeth smiled at the dialogue between head and hand and said, "He was rather quiet. He was a nice guy." Then he added creatively, "He would read books before he went out jogging."

"Oh, yeah?" said the boy. "How old was he?"

"About thirty," said Hedgepeth, thinking of himself.

"He was too old to be doing all that running," said the boy contemptuously.

Hedgepeth felt his face turn red. "He was probably in better shape than you," he retorted.

"He was married, huh?"

Hedgepeth felt a twinge of jealousy as he agreed that the jogger was married, and he added, "But his wife didn't really appreciate him."

"Well, it doesn't matter then," said the boy.

"What doesn't?"

"You know—that he's not around any more. It probably doesn't make any difference to his wife."

"Maybe not, but it makes a lot of difference to me," protested Hedgepeth hotly. "I felt very close to him. My marriage is breaking up because of this." He began choking on self-pity and indignation.

"At least he didn't have any kids," said the boy.

Hedgepeth looked curiously at the boy, who averted his face and stared out at the rosy horizon. Then the boy swallowed hard, cracked his knuckles, and said, "I shot him from the house." The side of the boy's neck was pulsing wildly. He took a sudden deep breath and continued, "From the second-floor window. He

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was running along the fence."

Hedgepeth stepped backward and edged away. He was about to turn and leave the boy alone under the buckeye tree when the boy, without taking his eyes off the lake, said, "Aren't you interested?"

Rather than answer the question, Hedgepeth ran, lifting his heavy thighs before him like baskets of eggs. Thinking he heard the boy in pursuit he tried to go faster, but his right leg buckled beneath him. His chin struck his knee as he collapsed, and he tumbled on his head on the grass.

The unaccustomed exertion had made him dizzy and nauseated. His stomach seemed to be in danger of being sucked up through his throat. He saw the boy's legs beside him as heavy as the trunks of old oaks. Behind them the sun rose over the edge of the water, brilliant and cold.

Hedgepeth turned away and waited to die. When the blood stopped pounding in his ears he became aware of the boy sitting on the grass beside him.

"You're the first person I've really talked to in a year," said the boy. "I'm really screwed up."

Hedgepeth pushed himself up to a sitting position. His fear had been shaken out of him, and he felt curiously peaceful. A breeze from the lake seemed to carry the smell of alewives across the lawn. Hedgepeth nodded at the boy.

"I would have graduated from high school this year," said the boy. "But I began skipping classes and all that happy stuff. Now they want me to go until January. The hell with that! I might go to Canada. Come on, I'll show you the rifle I used."

Hedgepeth followed him back past the reflecting pool. The boy knelt beside a large paving slab of cement, dug his fingers into the dirt, then lifted the slab aside. Still digging with his fingers he uncovered a rifle whose barrel had turned orange with rust. "It's a .32-caliber Remington," said the boy. "I got him in the neck." The boy stood up, holding the weapon. "It's funny. I didn't think there was a chance I'd hit him. You know anything about shooting?"

Hedgepeth shook his head.

"At night you can't use the sights to aim," the boy explained. "You just sort of point the thing. He was running. I just wanted to scare him."

The boy looked questioningly at Hedgepeth, who said, "I understand."

"Come on, I'll show you what I did with the body." He

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led Hedgepeth down to the edge of the water. "I wrapped it in some chicken wire that the gardener was using for the arbor. Then I tied it to one of those concrete benches and pushed it over." He shrugged and said, "It hasn't come up yet. Maybe it washed out in the lake. There's probably an undertow here."

Hedgepeth nodded, turned away, and walked back across the lawn. The boy caught up with him and said, "I've still got the newspaper clipping. You probably got a copy yourself."

"Huh? No, I haven't. I didn't know anything was in the paper," said Hedgepeth.

"Sure," said the boy. He pulled out his wallet and unfolded a clipping patched at the creases with scotch tape.

Hedgepeth took the fragile piece of paper and read of a man whose wife reported him missing after he failed to return from jogging one night. The address was one of the two apartment buildings on Elm that Hedgepeth had spent hours watching. A picture of the man accompanied the story. He looked slightly worried—just the way he used to look when he was running.

Hedgepeth sighed, refolded the clipping, and returned it to the boy, saying, "They made a mistake on the date."

"What do you mean?" asked the boy.

"This all happened two weeks ago. I remember the night it happened."

"What the hell you talking about?" said the boy.

"According to that clipping you showed me, the jogger disappeared on the night of my first wedding anniversary. That was more than a year ago."

"So?"

"So the date's wrong."

"What're you trying to tell me?" said the boy furiously. "That's when I shot him. Last spring."

"Last spring? He's been dead a year?"

"What do you think I been telling you?" The boy glared accusingly at Hedgepeth and said, "I thought talking about it would make me feel better, but I feel worse now."

"I'm sorry," said Hedgepeth.

The boy shrugged and walked away. Hedgepeth started for home. A wild wondering look lifted his heavy eyebrows and erased his worried squint. The morning immediately seemed to him to be full of bright detail. The ground was thick with the soft long shadows of early morning stippled in patches where the dew caught the low eastern sun. To the west the sky was a light cloudless blue.

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Hedgepeth detoured across a lawn to put his face into a heavy spray of hawthorn blossoms, but snorted and reared back when he sniffed their foul odor. He passed a long yew hedge whose dark evergreen foliage was brightened by light clusters of new pale-green needles.

At home he took off his shoes and trousers, sat on the bed, and gently woke Stephanie. As she stirred and shyly yawned, he saw a tenderness in her waking face that he hadn't seen for a year. He didn't realize that from his own face had lifted the heavy portcullis of locked muscle with which he had been guarding his preoccupation with the jogger. Her friendly smile surprised and delighted him, and he told her that there had been no jogger since the night of their first wedding anniversary.

"I know," she said.

"You knew? Really?" he asked.

"There was some talk when he disappeared. One of the girls in the building knew his wife."

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked.

"I don't know. I was afraid to, I guess. It seemed so important to you. He really *was* there for you."

"Not any more," he said. Slowly, and with a penitential awkwardness, he reached out and touched her pregnant stomach.

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a NEW Inspector Seal (Ret.) story by

JOHN PIERCE

This strange Agatha-Christiean case really started while Chief Inspector Seal (Retired) was watching "Miss Greensleeve" on television. Did Seal have "some extrasensory premonition of the crime"? Emphatically no. "Abracadabra. Now you see her, now you don't... Every stick of evidence I've seen today, you've seen—every mote and beam"...

John Pierce, once again sui generis . . .

ABRACADABRA

by JOHN PIERCE

I am Albert Claxton, of whom Creighton Seal—the Chief Inspector—sometimes speaks. As old friend and golfing partner I was asked by the Boar's Club to devise an encomium for the testimonial dinner to honor Seal's recent retirement. I am not a good speaker, and I picture him in that austere, black-tie audience, his long legs ajiggle and a smile beneath his foolish mustache.

A few golfing tales, I suggested. No, not at all. Wanted was a snappy twenty-minute rundown of those recondite talents germane to the apparatus of a supersleuth. I protested raucously. I'm in realty. Why not big Jonathan Stout, longtime Captain of Detectives under Seal? But Stout had already been solicited, with negative result. He had closed his eyes, massaged his fat head until his fillings showed, and asked to be left alone. I am not sure Stout couldn't also do with retirement.

There was nothing left but for me to beg help from Seal. I drove there on slippery streets. It had rained hard all afternoon and then tapered off. It threatened to rain through the night.

He was watching television on the mammoth color set left to him by his aunt. I mixed my own drink while recollecting that he had rarely watched television. It showed in his almost childlike bemusement as

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he digested the local amateurish evening fare. Had he fallen in love with "Miss Greensleeve Life and Casualty," with her pale eyes and reedy little voice and unoriginal face shrunk to nothing by the outlandishly high silver bouffant wig? Was he mesmerized by the banality of the presentation? Happy me, for my purposes, if I could claim that I detected in his absorption some extrasensory premonition of the crime about to take her from us. But I cannot. He watched the same screen I did—all the unction and trumpetry of Greensleeve Life Insurance as their intra-office sales competition reached a squalid pitch.

Who would win? Which of twelve clean-cut self-starters would, between last month and Monday next, accumulate the most "points," bring security and peace of mind to the greatest number of "unprotected?" Only you in the audience had the answer: call your favorite Greensleeve agent, et cetera, et cetera.

Each Monday at 6:00 p.m. Miss Greensleeve was served up to prime audience suspense. She was Kathryn "Pussycat" Jenkins, a student at our own Cashmere College, where she majored in Ecology, minored in Speech Therapy, and hoped to become a model. She was speaking as I joined Seal with my glass.

". . . and for the *win*ner, get *this*, folks," she read fiercely off the Teleprompter, her desperate eyes twisting the wide meringue smile, "for the winner, *one week* for *two* in *fab*ulous *Holl*ywood, Cali*for*nia, at the *world-famous Starlight* Ho*tel*, transpor*ta*tion by *Cum*ulus *Air*lines—when you fly with *Cum*ulus, *you're* in the *clouds;* yes*sir*, folks, enjoy the *tongue*-tingling in-flight gourmet *din*ners by—"

Wardrobe by Bon Ton, jewelry by Bernheimer, wig by Leopold of Five Corners. Up and away in all directions soared the wig, up and beyond reach of the mundane camera, back across the studio, up and ever back until every principle of engineering lay destroyed. ". . . and now this brief message, folks, before a word or two from a *surprise visitor* who is opening tonight in his new play at our own Aspic Little Theatre!"

Seal rattled his drink happily. Was he serious? Would we go now to some banal Western, then to a cloying family comedy, and on to the late movie? I returned to the screen.

Surprise visitor my foot! Not even the Chinese Wall could have kept *him* out of there. Before us in a scholarly

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armchair lounged Greene of Greensleeves, ascoted and vandyke-bearded, a thin volume ajar in his hands. He was reading it. He had hardly expected our intrusion. His urbane show of surprise told us so. "Oh, *hello*," he said, and then frowned, and now gave us an oleaginous chuckle.

"I'm T. W. Greene," he confided, and winked confidentially. "Call me Tommy. I was just thinking. What *was* I thinking? Oh, yes. This volume—a neighbor's child left it in my car. Something erudite and forbidding, you're wondering? Oddly enough it *is*, in its way. *Mother Goose* is its title. How it does take us back. I was reminiscing over these little poems. I was thinking about little Jack Horner, who 'pulled out a plum' and—well, you know I just couldn't help thinking of the analogy between Jack and the person who's reached retirement age with a well-thought-out insurance plan."

T. W. Greene, owner and chief popinjay of Greensleeve Life and Casualty. Who didn't know T.W., and his name splendid on the great revolving sign above the Spigot Building that housed his firm? Each Saturday the sales figures were totted, and the leading vendor was celebrated in lights for the week to come. It was visible from Seal's front windows.

LEADING THE SCENE
T. W. Greene
Greensleeve Life and
Casualty Co.

I knew him but we did not socialize. I had sold him the plot in Merrie Lane Terrace on which he had built his neo-Moorish pālace. He was tiny in stature but very large in the local Little Theatre. Knowing him I'd have bet unconditionally that the whole sales contest was but an excuse for the erection of the twirling sign—a Promethean box of glazed glassware, lighted from within, on which were affixed the black, interchangeable letters. Contest or no, we were stuck with the sign forever. Others made it on occasion (Leader This Week, Edgar B. Meek; Tops In Sales, Alexander Scales) but Greene made it most persistently, damn the figures. He owned the sign.

I had seen more than I wanted to. Creighton Seal had not. Here was Greene re-introducing Pussycat Jenkins.

"... mail tells us you await with understandable eagerness. So here she is for her Monday evening informal chat with you—MISS GREENSLEEVE LIFE!"

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"Thank you, Tommy, first I truly like to thank the minny, minny people who've written in to me, minny want to know what it's like to be Miss Greensleeve and appear in this beautiful wardrobe and be on television, well, for me, you know, I mean we grew up dirt-poor which is one reason I'm asking if anyone out there in the television audience happened to know my grandfather, I wish you'd—"

I sat up abruptly. An arm was seen reaching out, and a gross hand was seen grasping her elbow, and, like a tourist with a foot caught in a loose rope at Cape Kennedy, Pussycat disappeared from the screen.

". . . thank you, Miss Jenkins, and now from all of us . . ."

"Abracadabra," said Seal. "Now you see her, now you don't. That's the third Monday running she's brought up her grandfather and the third time she's been yanked off the stage."

He turned the set off. "I'm getting abnormally curious about just who her grandfather was."

He would not find out from Pussycat. That night, in the midst of a rainstorm and under circumstances of the wildest violence, Miss Greensleeve vanished from her digs. A news flash told me of it the next morning as I drove the drying streets to pick up Seal. Golf was out (I was nursing a cold anyway), but we'd mosey out for a game of billiards while I sounded him for the fodder for my speech.

He was switching off the noonday news as I joined him. "Most disturbing," he said thoughtfully, and summarized the late reports. A Greensleeve agent had rung vainly at her apartment at nine this morning. He was to transport her to a beauty parlor in preparation for her noontime appearance at a fashion show. He found her landlord; they entered. Inside was thorough chaos—signs of wall-to-wall struggle, possessions and the clothes she'd been wearing hurled everywhere.

"As well it happened on a golfless day," Seal commented, gazing toward the turning Greensleeve sign. "Might give us something to do."

I said I had something to do—write my speech.

"No problem," he said, and paced the floor meditatively, past photographs of Seal playing polo, Seal with dignitaries, Seal in Army Intelligence. "No better way to learn the trade than under field conditions. We'll have a try at finding Pussycat."

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"How can you?" I asked him. "Retired, you have no police prerogatives."

"Junk word, prerogative. I was curious enough about Miss Jenkins' grandfather to put in a phone call or three. His name was Ephraim Tenney. He too dissolved in thin air some years ago. Familiar to you?"

"Sure," I remembered. "Right off his deathbed, I believe, in 1951. You were off somewhere then, maybe Washington. Hardly see how *she'd* remember him—she'd have been about one year old."

"Obviously she doesn't remember. She was asking for information on the air."

"Something her mother Mildred didn't tell her, then. Her mother divorced Jenkins, then married a fellow named Hofstetter, who got killed in the Korean War. They both lived out there with Tenney in that old picturesque, tumbledown house that's still standing just beyond the Old Stoatley Trace."

"Ah, yes. Cashmere College has it now—uses it for their ecological studies. Describe Tenney."

"Quarrelsome old rat in his day. Inherited a lot of money but he wasn't too bright about investing it and it pretty well filtered away. Strait-laced, a church deacon and rampaging prohibitionist, fought anybody anywhere, just as he fought death. Refused hospitalization or surgery, wouldn't have a lot of tubes sticking in him, and was determined to cure himself with vitamins and organic foods. Didn't happen, but he'd never believe it. Kept getting up out of bed and going outside and falling until they had to hire a male attendant to hold him down. You know, as if proving to himself he wasn't dying."

"And?"

"Wandered off one night when he didn't have a week left to live. Down to ninety-six pounds and barely rational. Attendant stepped into the kitchen to bring him something, came back, and he was gone. They dragged the river, suspecting suicide, but it's too wide and swift there. Never found him."

"Leaving Mildred Hofstetter and daughter Kathryn Jenkins destitute, as Kathryn says?"

"That's the story but, poor or not, they wouldn't let go of that house. It's a four-generation family thing, with horse stalls and outbuildings and fifteen acres. They lived on there and Mildred worked as a bookkeeper until she died. By that time the place was dilapidated and couldn't be given away. Too far out,

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plumbing rotten, and the roof falling in."

"How did you come into all this?"

"I'm in real estate, remember? Willie Mosely tried to sell the place for Kathryn. Nothing doing until an old guy, Dr. Walters of the Cashmere Ecology Department, talked the college into saving the place. He'd been at it long enough, ever since the old man vaporized—knew him as I remember—but Cashmere doesn't have a lot of money. They came up, at last, with an arrangement. They would take over the place and, as funds permitted, restore it as a historic landmark. In return they gave Kathryn a free education and paid her mother's medical bills."

Seal flopped into a leather chair and as quickly stood again. "Coincidences sprout. Pussycat, according to the sources, was assigned to one of the dorm bunkhouses out there."

"Why, if she had an apartment here in town?"

"The students don't live there, they just spend one week a month on a rotating basis—organic vegetables, nature study, whatever they do."

"Was she out there last night?"

"Briefly. A student named Mooney drove her out after her television stint. She had to get something or other. Was picked up after dark by Call-Me-Tommy Greene who'd gone out to borrow some props for his last night's Little Theatre extravaganza. He drove her back to her apartment so she'd be on hand for the morning beauty-parlor appointment she never kept."

"No clues in all the wreckage?"

"Captain Stout finds one. A screen was unlatched via a hole poked through it. I meant to ask you something. Yes. Whatever became of the male attendant who let Tenney get away?"

I thought, then remembered. "He was killed by a hit-and-run driver about two months after that."

"Good Lord, what was everybody doing? Let's take a ride."

I didn't know. I had a cold and my speech to write. Writing about crime didn't mean taking part in it. I had hoped for a nice calm afternoon. "Look, there's not apt to be any, ah, shooting, is there?"

He was putting on his jacket. "How can there possibly be, Albert? I'm not armed."

In my car we went the length of Crown Street and

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turned right on Mulberry, bypassing the business district. Above us the sun broke through.

" 'Leading the Scene, T. W. Greene," read Seal, looking over his shoulder. "Blessed if you can't see that from everywhere."

"Including, I'll bet my bottom dollar, from the front steps of his Little Theatre," I said, waiting for a red light. "Right there to the left of us, that green building with the green camper parked in front. Picture Greene running out between acts to bask in all that glory."

Seal read the garish posters as we passed. "Don't see how he could manage time for much of anything—written, produced, directed, and acted in by Greene. You're an old Chamber of Commerce glad-hander. What's the good word on T.W.?"

"A minor jackass. Washed out as a professional actor, he opted for life insurance. Made it on the second try."

"Reputable outfit, Greensleeve?"

"Who ever knows in this state before it's too late? Hidden clauses, canceled policies, mysterious bankruptcies, and any wretch who's tried knows there's nothing you can do about it. So each election year they fake an investigation. Investigate how? A third of the state legislature is on the payroll as 'legal counsel' and another third is roaming Europe as lobby guests."

"How old a man, Greene? Fifty?"

"Older than he looks. Strong on vanity—elevator shoes, sunlamps, and weightlifting at the Y. Little squirt, or he wouldn't make his TV spiel from an armchair. Put beside Pussycat he wouldn't reach the bottom glue in her wig."

"But not too old, at any rate, to have arrived at an *au pair* arrangement with Pussycat? Her presence on screen in exchange for his presence off?"

"Hardly think he'd be that dumb, Creighton. He's right up where he wants to be."

It was a mile out on chuckholed asphalt. I saw the mansard roof above the treeline but it did not seem to me this turn was the way in. It seemed so to Seal. "Right up there," he urged, insisting on a muddy, narrow inlet scarred by deep twin auto tracks.

"I don't think—"

"Right here, turn in right. See the tracks?"

I can't stand back-seat driving. I braked hard, turned in on the mud surface, gunned it forward in the deep tracks

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already there, and felt us sinking as the tires lost traction. I rocked it and tried reverse, but the wheels spun. I cut the ignition. Silence. Trees few men knew the names of and ten hundred gibbering birds. "Creighton, you insistent clod."

He got out, as did I. He said, "Other fellow was just a better driver than you."

"Other fellow my foot! He didn't drive in here, he just nosed in to turn around. That's no road, it's solid grass."

He was bent over the tracks we'd got caught in. "Naturally it's grass," he said enthusiastically. "It's the Old Stoatley Trace."

"The point is, we're stuck to the floorboards, Seal."

"It's the Trace, all right." Away he bounded on the short clipped grass. "Come along. We'll walk in and subpoena ecological assistance. Here's the marker."

Forty feet in where the tracks ended, half obscured by a myrtle bush, was the metal sign vaunting the trail's historicity. I was not in the mood for it; my feet were mud, and he was thirty yards down the trail, striding at a pace I refused to emulate, ducking his head under dripping boughs. I followed morosely on the short wet grass, tended nicely by the historical society. A bicycle, I noted, had not made it either. Footsteps along the prominent thin track told of some unfortunate person pushing the cycle in the rain.

On we went until we heard, then saw, the swollen yellow river. Short of this, the cycle track turned left through the canebrake. Seal followed it across a narrow field, traversed a wooded thicket, then followed the path into full view of the fine old house and its outbuildings. We circled a stable. Propped against an antique boarded well was the bicycle. Spraying white paint on the back-porch latticework was its owner.

He was white-maned and fragile, but spry as any student. He greeted us affably. He was Dr. Byron Walters, head of Ecology. He apologized that paint forbade his shaking hands. "Yes, of course, Inspector Seal, isn't it? Or does retirement ablate you of the title?"

Seal agreed it did.

"But your curiosity about Miss Jenkins overwhelmed you."

"I have developed a certain affection."

"Yes, she was getting quite a response," agreed the Doctor. "Interfering with her studies, I'm afraid."

"Have you not heard the news, then?" Seal asked,

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puzzled, as was I, at his nonchalance.

"Heard it, reheard it, police tramping through the gardens and scaring the chickens, grilling me and young Mooney and anyone else in sight. Hardly the venue for their operations when it was her apartment from which she was abducted. Allegedly abducted," he added wryly.

"You're not convinced?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Inspector, not *you?* Can you think of one tawdry trick that Greensleeve outfit wouldn't conjure up to hustle life insurance to half the town?"

"Publicity gimmick, you think?"

"Of course it is," he said, putting down his spray gun beside his bicycle on the boarded well. "What gaudier headlines than you'll see tonight. *MISS GREENSLEEVE DISAPPEARS.* She'll stay 'gone' a while, then she'll turn up, superficially bruised and shorn of memory, just in time to be hustled to the studio to announce the winners. Just look what they've done to her and to us already—Ecology and Speech Therapy with ambitions as a model indeed!

"Join me in sitting down. Mooney's around somewhere and has a car that should pull you out of the mud. Over there, through the trees a hundred yards, those two log structures are the two dorms we've set up—one each for boys and girls. Beyond that a cabin for myself and Dr. Lathrop, who's got most of them out planting soy. We're in bed by ten at night and up at five, and grow all our foods, everything organic, no pesticides or chemicals, and—"

I fought off a herculean sneeze. What were we doing here? Why not find a phone and get a tow? Stupid of me not to have locked the car. I was contemplating kicking Seal when a bulky, shag-headed youth materialized from behind an outbuilding and stepped into a dark doorway. A tool fell, others joined it, followed by a salvo of shrill profanity in the air.

Seal made it in five strides to my dozen. The boy lay across plowshares and garden tools and the wheel of an upside-down wheelbarrow. Seal offered him a hand; he rose shouting, "It's the fourth damn time I've cleaned up this storeroom and the twelfth time someone's fouled it up!"

"Calm down, Mooney," came the Professor's voice quietly. "We're out here to live with nature."

"Damn nature," he said, rubbing mud off his white shirt. "I had it all cleaned up

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yesterday afternoon."

"Well, I don't know, Mooney. I just don't know. Mr. Greene-Leading-the-Scene went in there with Kathryn last night for those props for his Little Theatre. You have full permission to do anything to him short of murder."

Seal turned from Mooney, who had succumbed beneath a tree. "Were you here last night, Doctor, when Greene came to get her?"

"I rode his fender out the drive to lock up the gate at the entrance. We lock it nightly to appease the parents, some of whom are uneasy about their progeny spending nights out here."

"What time was this, approximately?"

"Just after dark. Seven fifteen or so. She helped him load the stuff—a spinning wheel, an old butter churn, and who knows what else, and off they went in his station-wagon camper."

"And Mr. Mooney here drove her in."

"I drove her," Mooney said, "if you can picture her in that red dress and wig riding my dune buggy. Not very good company. She was burned up about getting cut off the air again. They had some kind of loud argument, she and Greene."

"Yes, I'm very much interested in Miss Jenkins' grandfather," Seal remarked. "You knew him, didn't you, Professor?"

"You'll have to third-degree someone else about him," Walters answered, climbing onto his bicycle. "I've a meeting with the trustees and have to get dressed for it. I'm sure Mooney will assist you with your car."

He went wobbling away on a brick sidewalk that led him past a doddering pergola.

"Abracadabra," murmured Seal, and then we heard Mooney in helpless laughter.

"Magic formula," he said between guffaws. "Mention Kathy's grandfather, swoosh he's gone. It's a game we play out here."

"Wonder why."

"Deep unquiet waters," Mooney said, getting to his feet. "The story is, he used to spark Kathy's widowed mother, except something didn't turn out quite right. I'm ready any time you gentlemen need help with your car."

We followed him around the lower veranda. He motioned us beneath the improvised canvas top of a purple, flowered thing mounted on a Jeep chassis. He ignited the unmuffled engine and went blasting through oak trees to the gravel drive.

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"Kathryn's grandfather, all she really knows about him is what little her mother told her: there was supposed to be money left them; but there wasn't. She wouldn't give her details, it was done and no undoing it, and why bring Kathy up bitter? Well, we've worked out our own theory. After the crash the old man wouldn't trust a bank with a dime. So what do with it? Hide it, man.

"We figure him trying to get out of that deathbed and sneak off after the dough three or four times a day. So one night he made it and this guy, this male nurse Mencke, followed him. Hell, Tenney didn't weigh a hundred pounds. No trick to tail him to his cache and then shove him in the river. Or so we figure it. Then someone got Mencke."

He braked between the twin pillars at the exit. "Greene, now, the name 'Jenkins' didn't mean a thing to him, so they picked her for that phony program. Catch his indigestion when right away she starts using his program to find somebody who knew her grandfather and with whom she could compare notes. Get Greene when the party who killed Ephraim—some big customer or politician doing favors for him or maybe somebody with something on Greene—dropped in one afternoon to tell him to shut that girl up or else. See, *they* couldn't know what *she* knows—which is nothing, and they *sure* didn't like the idea of her pooling her information with someone else who did know something and opening up a whole new can of peas."

He slowed where my car languished. He spun right and backed in behind it.

"Did she give you any details of her quarrel with Greene?" Seal asked him.

"They just fought," Mooney said, searching his rear floor for a towrope. "Even without the cut-off bit, she was mad as hell about all those furs and dresses anyway. Her own fault, but let's face it. I mean, she looks okay, but Kathryn's never going to win the Miss Universe title."

"What about the furs and dresses?"

"I'd ask Greene about that."

"Nice youngster, Mooney," I said, dropping down the rise into town.

"Talkative, too," mused Seal.

"Nice spot for Walters to be in if there is money buried out there and Kathryn dead."

"Hard to believe she's dead. Why rip her place apart, then cart her elsewhere for disposal?"

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"Interesting kind of red herring Walters offers—that it's all publicity. Hard to swallow, though. Presupposes her being quick enough to stay cool under a lot of police questioning later."

"A fleetness she gives little evidence of."

"Well, what *have* you evidence of?"

"Speech material? Nothing yet, only questions, a few of which Mooney explored. What, let's wonder, was Greene doing back in 1951 when old man Tenney disappeared? Where was Walters then? Why the apoplexy if it was a natural disappearance, or, if it wasn't natural, why kill a man who had less than a week to live? Why purloin Pussycat at this juncture? What's the motive, who'd profit? Who profited by the running down of the nurse Mencke? Those are the matters at hand."

"Shouldn't take you more than six months at the inside."

"You're a pessimist, Albert. Turn right on Spring Street and look for 2316. There should be a few police cars around."

There were, and in the lower hallway a patrolman greeted Seal and let us into a small efficiency apartment in cyclonic disarray. Stuff was smashed and uprooted and thrown everywhere. A television set was overturned and the cosmetics on her dressing table were hurled aside. Two officers went emotionlessly about their alchemy.

Centerpiece to it all was Captain Stout, telephoning from a chair that was, beneath his bulk, so much doll furniture. His squinting eyes followed us as though straining to extract our identities, our reason for being there. I might have backed out had not Seal summoned me across the room with a wag of his head.

He had scooped up the disheveled silver wig with a pencil. Below it on the floor were her red shoes, the matching dress worn on television, stockings, and black underthings. "Removed rather tempestuously, wouldn't you say?" He spoke of the wig as he revolved it. "Oh, oh, here's something." He extended it to me. Across the crown was a prominent indentation marked by what I took to be rust. Now he lifted it to peer inside. "Not good," he said. "Blood. Not much blood but—blood."

"Enough to dent her skull in," said Stout's voice laconically. "Anything I can do for you gentlemen? Guided tour, decal for your car?"

"Don't be biting, Jonathan. This is my old friend Albert

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Claxton you've heard me mention. He knows Greene."

Stout nodded expressionlessly. "Not to be disrespectful, but that's almost worse than having no references at all. Greene's just about to bust my patience trying to get in here and inventory all the stuff on loan from these fancy stores in town."

Seal looked into the walk-in closet where there hung undisturbed a dozen dresses and two mink stoles. Wigs lined an upper shelf and new shoes filled the door-length caddy. "Did you let him in?"

Stout squeezed his round nose. "Might have except for something my wife told me. She watches that TV stuff. Says they actually announced that Miss Greensleeve was *given* the wardrobe. Greene denies that, claims there was a 'misunderstanding' and the clothes are on loan from these places and he's personally responsible to the tune of $3,000."

Seal drifted to the only window. He bent over the hole punched in the screen an inch above the open latch. "Any ideas, Jonathan?"

"Yeah, one," Stout said. "It stinks. Clubbed on the wig, or there'd be a lot more blood. Clothes she was wearing on the floor there. Wet towels around the shower stall. What I'm supposed to believe is that someone got in through that window and hid till she got home. Waited for her to get out of that pullover dress and the rest of it and then take a shower and turn the bed down, all the time wearing that two-foot-high wig. Choose between that and him slugging her when she walked in and then undressing her and walking out with a naked girl over his shoulder. And, yes, I got a phone call concerning you. Walters out at the college phoned the Commissioner wanting to know how come you were pressuring him when your only connection with the police force is fond memories."

"Memories and twenty years of dumb questions," Seal said. "Surprised at Walters. He was chock-full of airy gossip until we got around to her grandfather, Ephraim. Right, Albert?"

"Hell, you're not going into that," Stout said.

"Then why does mention of Tenney send them all running? What was the disposition on that male nurse of his, Mencke, that got run down by the hit-and-run driver?"

"Never found him."

"Doesn't mean it's closed," Seal said.

Leading the Scene, T. W. Greene.

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"Fellow gets more coverage than a sex goddess," Seal remarked, watching the sign revolve. We sat in the car in front of the girl's apartment with two cans of beer bought from a mini-store across the street. He had not yet decided where next to go. "What building is that sign attached to?"

"Where Greensleeve Life is? The Spigot Building."

"Spigot. That's the one with the bilious green marble in the lobby? Believe I know the super there. Bit of luck."

"You're not going into Greensleeve's offices, I hope."

"Never know. Write that in your speech. 'Never knows.'"

"You might not but I do. This is where I get off."

"Yes, you do have your business reputation."

"And wet feet and incipient pneumonia and office mail to read."

"So go change shoes and take some aspirin and read your mail. And do something for me while you're home. You said Greene made it in life insurance on the second try. Get on the phone and ask someone about his first try. You know enough life-insurance people. Ask about his first company, get the name of anyone in town who might have worked there with him. I'm going to the *Clarion* offices to prowl through some old newspapers and I just might drop into the Spigot Building. Meet me at the Caracole Steak House for supper on me at, say, nine o'clock and we'll take one more little ride."

"Class is quaintness," Seal said, cutting into his steak at the Caracole. "It is eating by candlelight, a pursuit that has blinded twenty million people from Adam on while waiting for Thomas Edison to be born. What did you learn about the early Greene?"

"Between 1946 and '52 he operated an outfit called Integrity Life. They folded in '52. He went off to recuperate and then tried again with Greensleeve in '56. I found a guy who was employed there—at Integrity—for a while but quit. His name's Arthur T. Odom and he's listed in the phone book."

"You talk to him?"

"About what?"

He shook his head dolefully. "You'd make a pretty bad cop, Albert."

"Who's trying to? And if I was, and was under your tutelage, I'd resign. I spend all day following you, you don't tell me a damned thing. Now you've been through some old newspapers and busted, I presume, into the Greensleeve

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offices, and you're not even going to detail that."

"Harsh judgment, Albert. Every stick of evidence I've seen today, you've seen—every mote and beam. In the papers I merely read up on Tenney's disappearance and the hit-and-run. I found nothing we don't already know. What I learned at the Spigot Building was zero, as you'll see. I will now phone your Mr. Odom, Greene's former employee, something you could have had an insurance crony do. That done, we will climb into your automobile, taking these binoculars I have borrowed, and drive a short distance. Secreted off the road we'll find, in certain police cars bearing certain police specialists, our unhappy Captain Stout who has the authority of which retirement, in the words of the eminent ecologist, has ablated me."

I wrote "Big Mouth" in my notebook and while he telephoned I added a brandy to his bill.

It was 10:30 when he led six of us down the Old Stoatley Trace in veiled moonlight, the quiet clink of their equipment reminiscent of an infantry patrol in the pre-dawn. We did not speak per his strict injunction, a prohibition that chafed me. I had a question. Playing with the binoculars while he briefed them, I had become aware of something that only now registered on me: the revolving light above the Spigot Building was not burning. Nor did lights show from the dormitories beyond the mansion, but it was well past their bedtime.

We turned through the gap in the canebrake and crossed the narrow pasture to circle the horse stalls behind the home.

A crowbar pried loose the two-by-six planking. A block and tackle were affixed to the rusted steel superstructure. Stout waved us away as he let rope out to Officer Woods, his foot in the rope-end hook, down the well. I saw the peripheral dim glow of the officer's flashlight and heard his muffled voice twenty feet below, but turned away once Stout began hoisting him. Woods carried Kathryn Jenkins up. I was told she was nude, but the dark protected her.

It was the weakest whisper of a moan that stopped them short of drawing the blanket over her battered face. They placed her on a litter and moved her back beyond some shrubbery while Stout dispatched a man to a patrol car to radio for an ambulance. They took down the block and tackle and restored the planking to the

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well, all this wordlessly and without a show of lights.

We were lurking in defilade when we saw the approaching headlights on the asphalt. They combed past us as they turned into the Stoatley Trace. There they flicked off, but we still heard the slow labored voice of the engine as it came in on the Trace, following it to the opening we had used in the canebrake.

"Class," I meant to jot into my speech notes. Preposterous Seal might be, but he had the way of an underfed ferret. No unridden bicycle could have made that deep an impression in the grass. The print was that of the wheelbarrow over which Mooney had tumbled and got his shirt black with mud. The wheelbarrow had transported her from the asphalt down the Trace and to the well, after which it was returned to the storeroom.

Nor could just any car have pulled into that inlet forty feet without bogging down, as my car had. I remembered Seal puzzling over those tire tracks. Backing out unassisted would have required four-wheel drive on a car, like a station-wagon camper.

He came quickly and stealthily, a coil of rope around his shoulder, following the familiar route of the wheelbarrow tracks. He came to the well. He had dropped the rope and was lifting his own crowbar when the flashlights pinned him from four directions, startling him quite as much (but far more genuinely) than the television cameras intruding on him as he reminisced over Mother Goose.

"I never *planned* to leave her down there," Greene shrilled in protest as they put the handcuffs on him.

As silly a statement as I've ever heard.

"I doubt he *did* plan to," said Seal. This trip I had brought a pocket flask. It went from Seal to Dr. Walters, who had come running over, and then back to me. "He was satisfied she was dead. The well was only a fast, temporary expedient. Sooner or later he had to get her out of there before her presence became known to the nose."

We stepped aside as a police truck backed in to collect the wheelbarrow. Greene's prints might be useful should higher powers try to discredit Kathryn's tale.

"But why did he come back tonight?" I asked. "Why at this particular time?"

"His play wasn't over until eleven," Seal said vaguely.

Walters had something. "I meant to apologize for my

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uncooperativeness. I admit the name Tenney *is* anathema to our function out here, and I really did think it was all a publicity stunt. But to re-evoke his name was to bring whole carloads of ghouls, sightseers, and news cameramen out here tramping through the place, upsetting our curriculum, making mockery of what we're trying to do."

"But you rather suspected Tenney didn't just wander off."

"Any fool would have suspected knavery. He definitely wasn't suicidal—he was too deeply religious; and he did assure Mildred Hofstetter that she and Kathryn would be well provided for. Then he vanished and there was nothing she could ever do about it. He was such a bloody fool with his money."

I did not understand it all and said so. I knew from a Seal-to-Stout colloquy that Greene had loaded the wheelbarrow with the spinning wheel and butter churn and allowed Walters to see him leaving, and then turned his car in and out of sight on the Stoatley Trace. There he'd knocked her in the head with a rusty tool and dewigged and undressed her and brought her back to the well in the barrow. She was too large, or he was too small, to manage her that distance otherwise, and he knew better than to leave his car tracks down the trace or chance anyone's hearing the engine. And he'd worked the well open and dropped her in and got back to the theater in time to preen before 300 art lovers.

That gave him the night to plant her effects in her apartment and otherwise create that dishevelment that would put the police off on a tangent. He'd succeeded once with Tenney and again with the nurse Mencke—facts his disintegration under Stout's questioning brought forth—and had little to lose and small time to function in after Kathryn's post-television tirade last night.

"But what could she threaten him with?" I asked. "She didn't really know anything."

"But she was news, Albert. Picking her as his Greensleeve queen without knowing who she was, he had given her a credibility, a pipeline to the other media, to say nothing of the pathos accruing to her as some poor, dumb, good-hearted girl victimized, made the fool and even cheated of what was promised her by that shoddy little sales campaign. All she had to do was get together with any of a number of people in town who remembered the facts of the Tenney case and she could have raised the kind of row that would not only

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have ruined their contest but precluded Greene's ever selling another policy anywhere or ever plastering his name in lights without catcalls or ever tripping again the boards of the Aspic Theatre."

"But Green's motive for disposing of Tenney?"

"Scent of motive scentable immediately he found out who 'grandfather' was and caught her soliciting help over the air. Out of umpteen thousand possibilities for Miss Greensleeve he had picked, in all innocence, the granddaughter of Ephraim Tenney. 'What happened to my grandfather's money?' might have been her topic, and somewhere out there in TV-land was someone who could tell her—and Greene knew it. Her mother, Mildred Hofstetter, had gone at him after Tenney's disappearance and certain death, but it was all quite legal under the murky ways of our insurance process, and there wasn't much she could do."

"You mean he reneged on a policy that Tenney had?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth, according to your own key discovery, his ex-employee at Integrity Life Insurance, Arthur T. Odom. Young fellow with a wife and baby daughter at the time, Odom was just off the G.I. Bill and full of ideals and ambition. Took some doing before he'd tell me anything. He'd seen Greene juggling the books and ratholing money and defaulting on payments and canceling policies long before Odom walked out of there in disgust one day. He was busting to do something about it, but then Tenney disappeared and Mencke got run down and he knew then the lengths to which Greene would go and he feared for his own wife and daughter.

"Ergo, Tenney had the policy and about a week left to live. Dying naturally, there'd have been no choice but for Greene to pay. But let Tenney disappear without the body's being found and Greene could stall it off indefinitely while he made provision for his next move. Four months passed and he declared 'bankruptcy,' which happens in this state every week and excites very little adverse curiosity if you've greased the proper palms. I suspect Greene is now a very wealthy man."

"And you checked that by invading his offices in the Spigot Building?"

"Never looked at a paper."

"What then? And how'd you know to wait for him in the bushes? You knew just when he was coming out. Why at 11:15 precisely? Why not at 3:00 a.m. or tomorrow night?"

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"I whispered to him in his own idiom, Albert. It's why you've got the binoculars. Follow the revolving sign."

"I looked for it earlier. I wanted to tell you. It's been turned off tonight."

"Only for adjustments and till eleven. I told you I knew the building super. Try again and recall Greene's literary taste."

I lifted the glasses and swept the skyline until I found it. I said, "Oh, my God," and handed them to Mooney, who collapsed in a fit of helpless laughter. I saw Greene strolling complacently from his theater performance and glancing skyward for reassurance of his fame. I saw his face contort and the feverish sprint for his camper. Was he any worse off than I'd be reciting this before the black-tied testimonial audience? Why, they'd laugh me out of the hall.

Before us they loaded Pussycat into an ambulance and Greene into a patrol car while Captain Stout, drawn by the merriment, eyed us cautiously.

"What does it *say?*" anguished Walters. "I can't *focus* these things."

Seal wouldn't talk, Mooney couldn't, and Stout from a yard away fixed his basilisk gaze on me. Catch *me* finishing the Mother Goose rhyme that begins *Ding, dong bell . . .*

EDITORIAL NOTE: No, you won't catch Albert Claxton finishing *Ding, dong bell;* but just in case your memory is reluctant or you don't have a Mother Goose book handy, here is a popular version:

Ding, dong bell!
Pussy's in the well!
Who put her in?
Little Johnny Green.
Who pulled her out?
Little Johnny Stout.

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a NEW "strange" story by

CELIA FREMLIN

William was "a wonderful husband" and he had "the patience of a saint." He was the stuff of which martyrs are made. At least, that's what the neighbors were beginning to say and think . . .

A distinguished story with the "luminous quality" that so many of Celia Fremlin's stories have . . .

GOLDEN TUESDAY

by CELIA FREMLIN

The tiny moment of suspense, the passing flicker of dread lest, this time, Coral would not be waiting for him at their usual table—this was all part of William's Tuesday happiness, and he wouldn't have missed it for anything. He paused in the doorway of the discotheque, savoring these moments of delicious terror (delicious because unfounded) while the pop music that Coral loved streamed out past him into the winter night, and his eyes searched the rosy dimness inside for a gleam of cool blonde hair, for a glimpse of pouting, impatient lips, fashionably metallic, and drawing, restless with waiting, on yet another cigarette.

As he stood there, bathed in the drumbeat rhythm, and with the pale glittering young people surging past him out of the night, William didn't feel 48. He didn't feel married; and least of all did he feel like the saintly, devoted paragon of a husband that his wife's illness had forced him into becoming.

Yes, forced. All through the years when Eleanor had been well and strong and like anyone else's wife, William had been like anyone else's husband—cheerfully selfish, casually loving, and full of complaints, as are a man's rights.

But Eleanor's illness had finished all that. It had silenced his complaints, pole-axed his selfishness. All that was left was

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the loving—casual no longer, but nursed and coddled like an overfed cat, bloated with pity and good intentions.

"What a wonderful husband!" the neighbors were beginning to say of him. "Whatever would she do without him?" "The patience of an angel," they were saying. "Never a cross word, even now that she's grown so trying, poor thing!"

Actually he had been hustled into being wonderful, inch by inch, and fighting all the way. Slowly, inexorably, Eleanor's aching back, her worsening stomach pains, had forced him back and back, blocking first one exit and then another, until at last here he was, like a man trapped by the advancing tide, finally and irrevocably at the mercy of her encroaching illness.

By attacks of nausea, by bouts of uncontrollable shivering, her sickness had got him into its power; bit by bit, day after day, it had molded him, twisting and transforming his commonplace flesh into an angel substance, the stuff of which martyrs are made. He had accepted his role of martyr because he could not fight it; he nursed Eleanor with tenderness and devotion because these seemed to be the only tools left to him; and his reward for all this was a monstrous, ever-increasing tedium, as Eleanor grew more and more boring, lapsed more and more into pain . . .

Someone had put on another record. It roared out from the russet darkness of the discotheque like a trumpet call to Youth, and William's nostrils quivered at the summons like those of an old warhorse. Youth, youth! His 48 years seemed to slide away into the night, and so did all thought of his dreary middle-aged wife, hollowed out by her dreary middle-aged operations.

He was free, free of it all, for one golden evening! Free like these bearded striplings, like these dozy half-grown girls, delicious in their ignorance of pain! Free! Free! His magic Tuesday evening had begun!

William pushed open the swinging door and marched, head held high, into the very shrine of youth, marched tall and proud because he had a girl in there of his very own. A girl as gloriously young as the rest, and as delectable, and waiting for *him.*

"Willy! *There* you are! I was beginning to think something had happened! I was afraid you'd had to stay with *her!* Oh, Willy, *darling!*"

She always welcomed him with these exclamations, reaching out her silver-tipped little

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fingers to draw him down beside her, into the place she had been guarding for him on the red plastic cushions. He loved the feel of her soft hands not yet touched by work; and he loved too her never-failing surprise, Tuesday after Tuesday, at his successful arrival at the rendezvous. The predictability of her every word and gesture was infinitely soothing to him; it gave to these Tuesday evenings a luminous quality, the precious minutes sliding through his fingers like a necklace of well-loved jewels. He knew already what her next words were going to be, and how he was going to answer them; he waited, joyously expectant as a child awaiting his familiar bedtime story.

"Is *she* any better?"

Coral's voice held just the note of anxious melancholy that is appropriate for asking about a hopeless invalid; but behind the sweet concern in her gray eyes William could see dancing an eagerness for morbid details that exactly matched his own aching need to confide them. Coral loved to hear of Eleanor's petulance, her sick-room fads and fancies, her endless aches and pains—loved to hear of them every bit as much as William longed to tell of them. It made them both feel so *healthy*, he and Coral, so vital, so united in the singular glory of not being ill!

And so William shook his head sadly, as he always did in answer to Coral's inquiry; he looked into her sparkling, expectant eyes, and to keep that enchanting eagerness dancing for him he raked his wearied memories for the things she most loved to hear.

She loved to hear that Eleanor had refused to take her medicine again, that she had scolded William for not responding quickly enough to her night bell, endlessly dragging him from sleep. She loved to hear that Eleanor had asked him, perhaps, for dry toast, or a glass of orange juice, and then, when he brought it to her, all daintily set out on a pretty lace cloth, had turned her face away in disgust, refusing to eat.

"Oh, dear!" Coral would say, licking her little silver lips. "Oh, dear, I *am* sorry! But the pain's better, is it—the pain in her back?"

Coral loved to hear about the pain in Eleanor's back; it made her own spine feel so straight and strong and youthful. She gave a lissome little shrug with it now, while she breathed her condolences, and William watched the small movement with delight. He leaned forward and kissed the smooth unlined cheek under

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the fall of gleaming hair.

"How marvelous it is to touch a woman who is *well!*" he murmured; and Coral glowed, and flaunted her well-ness before him for just the right length of time before gently prompting him—for after all, their time was short.

"She's not *worse*, though, is she?" she suggested, laying her little hand on William's with sweet concern. "The doctor doesn't think she's *worse?*"

The sweet secret zest in the young voice was to William like the forked flame of desire itself, and he responded to it like a lizard to the sun, his mind coming alive, darting this way and that among the sordid sickroom trivia for the kind of nourishment on which his and Coral's relationship flourished and grew fat.

"Not *worse*—not really," he said, with studied fairness, and whetting Coral's appetite by the tiny delay. "But it's the sickness, you see, she can't seem to keep anything down. No matter how carefully I prepare it."

Coral's silvery, knowledgeable voice broke in, right on cue.

"You know why that is, Willy, don't you? You do realize why she is doing it? Unconsciously, of course—I don't mean she'd *deliberately* do such a thing to you—but *unconsciously* she's equating food with love. By rejecting the food you offer her she's rejecting your love. Rejecting it out of jealousy, because she can't bear not to have all of it, every minute of the day. Her demands on your love have gone beyond all reason, my poor darling."

Sweet Coral! She never failed him, never! Aloud he said, "Oh, Coral, how wonderful it is to be with someone who *understands!* I couldn't talk about this to anyone else in the whole wide world, because it seems such a dreadful thing to say of one's own wife. But I *have* wondered myself, sometimes, if it isn't psychosomatic, some of it."

How the silver earrings bobbed and danced, in a sort of ecstasy of understanding!

"Yes," Coral murmured. "Yes, that's what I mean. Poor Eleanor. I'm sure she doesn't realize it herself, but after all, an illness *is* a way of keeping a husband at home, isn't it, when a woman hasn't—well, hasn't much else to hold him with, to make him want to stay with her."

She sipped her coffee delicately, watching him over the rim of the cup with gray, thoughtful eyes. The most wonderful part of the whole

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evening was just beginning, the moment they got to Eleanor's unconscious motivations. Like gods they soared together over the sick woman's disintegrating personality, pouncing on a complex here, a neurosis there, handing them back and forth to each other like jewels, with little cries of admiration.

"Of course, looking back, I can see that she always had these incipient hypochondriac tendencies . . ."

"She can't *help* it, of course, it's no use *blaming* her . . ."

"Lying in bed all day—it's no wonder her back hurts her."

"And it's not as if the doctor wasn't giving her plenty of pain killers . . ."

"You know, I've sometimes wondered if that pain of hers is really as bad as she fancies it is? I once read an article which said that jealousy, especially sexual jealousy . . ."

"And all that throwing up in the night—unconscious demand for attention . . ."

"Because she can't bear her husband to escape from her, even into sleep . . ."

The coffee in the two cups cooled in front of them as they talked. They needed no stimulant, for the thought of Eleanor, ugly and repellent on her bed of sickness, filled them with such a sense of their own health that it was like wine; it was like immortality itself.

But all too soon it was over. At eleven o'clock William must be home again, his weekly respite at an end. And only then did they look away from each other, a sort of shyness rising between them.

"If only—" began William, and stopped; and at the same time Coral murmured, "How long—" and checked herself. They moved out of the discotheque in silence, for they could not trust themselves to say another word.

When William got home he found that Eleanor had been sick again. As happened more and more frequently now, she had failed to get her head properly over the enamel bowl at her bedside; and as William, teeth clenched in a ghastly smile, set himself to his disgusting task, it suddenly flashed through his mind: This could be the last time; I don't *have* to go on like this.

And that night, as he tipped the allotted two sleeping pills into his wife's bony outstretched palm, the bottle shook and shuddered in his hand, and he felt the sweat springing out on his forehead, so that he had to turn his face away.

The impulse subsided almost as suddenly as it had assailed him; but it had left its mark,

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and during the ensuing week it would not leave him alone.

It would be so easy! Several times, as the days went by, he looked at the bottle as it stood on the bathroom shelf and had fantasies of mashing the pills and stirring the powder, all of it, into his wife's nighttime cup of gruel. He had visions of rushing into the discotheque next Tuesday, crying, "She's dead! She's dead!" and flinging himself into Coral's arms, and both of them sobbing for joy.

But he knew, really, that it was only a vision. One night he tipped a whole lot of the pills into the palm of his hand, handled them, and knew, for certain, that he would not dare. Why, the very feel of them on his bare skin set his heart pounding, and dizziness so blurred his vision that he could scarcely get the pills back into the bottle. Two—three—several of them went pitter-patter across the floor, and as he bent to retrieve them he felt the breath choking in his lungs, and his heart thudded as if it would burst through his ribs.

No, he, William, was not the sort of which murderers are made. He was the sort who would suffer, who would let Coral suffer. The weeks, the months, the years would go by, their love would wither, and still Eleanor would live on . . .

"William! William!"

The weak yet urgent voice twanged against his nerves, and he gave a guilty start.

"William, where are my pills?" the voice demanded, peevish and despairing. "Why are you being so long?"

Hastily, hands still trembling, he stuffed the last few pills back into the bottle.

"Coming, dear, coming," he called, and hurried into his wife's room. He looked into the gray sunken face in which no spark of beauty or gaiety was left; he looked at the sticklike arms that once, in their bloom, had held him close.

"If only I had the courage!" he thought.

But he reckoned without Eleanor's courage. The next morning, the Tuesday morning, the bottle of pills was empty, and Eleanor was dead. Dead on a Tuesday, dead on his glorious day. Had she known? And had she, knowing, chosen this day on which to release him?

He did not call the doctor, or indeed call anyone.

"Coral!" he kept repeating to himself. "When I see Coral . . ." And he sat all day in the silent house, waiting for the relief and the joy to wash over him, waiting for the moment when he would rush through the crowded discotheque crying, just as he had in his dreams,

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"She's dead! She's dead!"

The discotheque was more crowded and noisier than ever, and at first Coral did not hear what he was saying.

"She's *what?*" she asked as he leaned forward to repeat the news.

"She—she's—" He stopped, and he knew in that instant that he could never tell her.

For where now would be that sense of united well-being, that glorious sense of their joint health in contrast to Eleanor's sickness? What would they talk about, he and Coral, now that Eleanor's symptoms, her complaints, and her unreasonableness were gone?

Where would be Coral's marvelous sympathy and understanding now that Eleanor had escaped them forever, had moved on into a realm where the barbed insights of pop psychology could not follow her? What *was* Coral, anyway, now that she was no longer a bulwark against his dying wife?

William stared across the table at the empty-faced little blonde, who was waiting so impatiently for him to speak.

"She's—she's worse."

"Oh, my poor Willy! She kept you up again last night, did she? Oh, I can see she did, you poor darling, you look so tired! But you shouldn't give in to it, Willy, you really shouldn't. After all, *we* know, don't we, that she's not really in pain. It's only her unconscious aggression and jealousy . . ."

It was all right! It was the old Coral again, just as she had always been! Nothing had been changed, nothing spoiled. Their Tuesday conversations could go on exactly as before.

But for how long? For how long can you keep your dead wife propped against the pillows, never calling a doctor, never letting the neighbors in? He, William, too much of a coward to be a murderer, was going to be transformed, as the days went by, into a creature far, far worse than a murderer. A monster, a ghoul—the horror of it would blazon across the front page of every Sunday paper—and all because he didn't dare do *anything.*

He wondered, dreamily, whether any others of the ghouls and monsters of the world had attained their awful status in this way? By just doing nothing.

"O"

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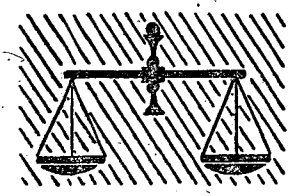

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Among publishers it is axiomatic that the great public will not read—or, at least, will not buy—a book of short stories. And, in general, this belief holds good. Anyone who has seen the publication of his own collected stories will remember its dismally small sale compared to that of even his most indifferent novel.

Being reader as well as writer of sensationalism, I don't share the prejudice. Detective fiction itself was introduced to the world by means of a short story, "The Murders in the rue Morgue." Perhaps the best, certainly the best-liked Sherlock Holmes tales are short adventures of not much more than five thousand words each. Without the short story we should have missed every investigation of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner, and, not least among notable sleuths, Jacques Futrelle's Professor Van Dusen, that fascinating eccentric called the Thinking Machine. But why argue?

If this month our first recommended titles are both volumes of short stories, never mind. You may like the medium, or you may be open to a sporting challenge. And in any case my choice will be supported by paperback reprints of two first-class novels, either or both of which should please every taste.

The twenty short stories about Peter Death Bredon Wimsey, younger brother of the Duke of Denver, have been collected in one handsome volume, Dorothy L. Sayers's *Lord Peter* (Harper & Row, $10.00), together with a perceptive introduction by James Sandoe, a sound appreciation by Carolyn Heilbrun, and E. C. Bentley's hilarious parody, "Greedy Night." We follow Lord Peter Wimsey from the seeming dilettante-figure in "The Man with Copper Fingers" to the vital personality of "The Haunted Policeman" after his marriage. All these exploits are good; several must rank as minor classics. Despite the fiendish ingenuity of "The Queen's Square," my own favorite will always be that aforementioned tale of the haunted policeman, the last story this author ever wrote.

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I knew the lady well. We met in '36, when she sponsored me for the Detection Club, and remained good friends at the time of her death more than twenty years later. On seeing an expanse of damp sand, she once wrote, the instinct of every right-thinking person is to rush out and make footprints all over it. She left her own footprints in the realm of mystery; they are not footprints on sand. Dorothy Leigh Sayers, hail and farewell.

As high praise for *Murder Most Foul*, edited by Harold Q. Masur (Walker, $5.95), no more need be said than that the 1971 Mystery Writers of America anthology fully lives up to the standard set by its predecessors. Mr. Masur, himself one of our best bafflers, has selected with an unerring eye.

Fifteen tales from various hands explore every alley of homicide enacted or envisaged. Whether in alphabetical listing the author's name occurs as early as Bloch or as late as Waugh, each is at the top of his form. You will find Ellery Queen's best short story, "Mind Over Matter," as well as "Selena Robs the White House," a fine study in diabolism by Patricia McGerr. The reader can't go wrong amid so many connoisseurs, who wish him a pleasant nightmare.

If on its first appearance you missed *The A.B.C. Murders*, by Agatha Christie (Pocket Books, 95¢), don't miss it as one of ten Christie novels now available in paperback.

Many critics call this book Dame Agatha's masterpiece. Certain jeering letters to Hercule Poirot seem as inexplicable as those strangely assorted victims, each with an A.B.C. railway guide on or near the body. But don't underestimate Poirot. Despite confusion, panic, or the antics of an apparent maniac, the whole design seems simple when you learn its secret; and that, after all, is the essence of a good detective story.

With Ian Fleming's *Diamonds Are Forever* (Bantam, 95¢), a James Bond adventure originally published before Agent 007 achieved worldwide renown, we find Bond here involved in no coil of espionage, but in a diamond-stealing racket allied with other rackets no less deadly.

After the slaying of a scorpion in West Africa, its action whips to London, to New York, in a blaze of violence from Saratoga to Las Vegas, then back to Africa and the slaying of the last scorpion as the flaming helicopter falls. The narrative is hypnotic, the American dialogue authentic American. Pay no attention to scoffers; trust the ever-reliable firm of Fleming and Bond.

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This is the 365th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an offbeat, meaningful story of a double crime . . .

At the time we accepted "Block Party," the author, Percy Spurlark Parker, was the manager of one of the Chicago stores in the Osco Drug chain. He was just past 30, married, and he and his wife have three children. His hobby is writing, writing, writing . . .

BLOCK PARTY

by PERCY SPURLARK PARKER

Sam Tolen stood in front of Mrs. Okeckie's house, disgusted at the sight of the place. He had lived on this block for nearly a year now, and had seen the house often, but this was the first time he had inspected it closely.

White paint dirty to the point of looking gray was peeling off the two-story frame structure in numerous places. The paint on the porch, which ran the width of the house, was in similar poor condition, and there were noticeable sags in the railing. Five windows faced the street, two on the first floor, three on the second. It was difficult for him to detect which windows were dirtier.

The lawn, if it could rightly be called a lawn, was nothing more than patches of grass. There was an old tree stump just to the right of the house beginning to rot. And it was quite evident that the dogs in the neighborhood had been using the grounds as their personal property.

This monstrosity of a house sat in the middle of a block on which all the other homes were less than two years old. An ugly scar on what otherwise would have been a beautiful face. Maybe Harry Brent was right, he thought. Maybe they should take action.

He had just left Harry and the other members of the block club and had come directly here from the meeting.

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Harry was the self-appointed president of the block club. Well, maybe not self-appointed. When the club was being formed Harry had nominated himself and no one had opposed him. He was an ex-con, having served six years of a five-to-ten on armed robbery. Five minutes of conversation with Harry, and a person would learn that much about him. His rehabilitation was something he was quite proud of. On his parole he had got a job in the steel mill where he was now a foreman.

Harry had called the special meeting that Saturday morning, and as usual the meeting was held in the basement of his home. There were 20 homes on the block, and 19 members in the club, Mrs. Okeckie being the only resident who did not belong.

Sam always took a seat at the opposite end of the table from Harry. It was not that he disliked Harry. He simply realized they were two different types, and Sam preferred not being close to him. The only thing they had in common was their concern about the maintenance of the block.

"Okay, fellas, let's get this thing rolling," Harry had said in his normally loud tone. Even seated he towered over the rest of the men at the table. He had a high forehead, fat jowls, and small eyes. Black curls of hair protruded at the neck of his T-shirt and matted his thick forearms.

"I called this meeting, fellas, so we could make a final decision on what to do about that Okeckie dame and her house."

"Oh, not again," Marv complained. Marv was a fat little man who owned the house on the southeast corner of the block.

"Yes, again, damn it," Harry said, looking up and down the table.

Sam felt he looked especially long at him, as though Harry expected him to object to going over the subject again. Hell, he really did object to it. What was the use? Mrs. Okeckie had been approached several times. She did not want to join the block club and she was not going to clean her place up. Of course, Harry had been the one who had talked to her, and maybe that was the problem.

"I went to see her again last night," Harry said. "And you know that old witch threw me out! Threatened to call the cops on me if I didn't leave. Me, Harry Brent. A guy who ain't had any trouble with the law for over twenty years. Damn it, I wanted to belt her one!" He slammed his fist on the table.

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"But I held onto my temper, came right home, and called you fellas for this meeting this morning. I know you'll agree that we can't let her stay here any longer."

He looked back and forth at the other members. There was a collection of wrinkled foreheads, parted lips, long frowns. They were all thinking the same thing, Sam thought. What was Harry planning to do?

"Tonight we burn the old bag out."

"Hey, no!"

"We can't do that."

"No, no, forget it, Harry."

"It's crazy!"

This was the chorus that Harry received, everyone talking at once, some of them shouting.

"I think it's a damn fine idea," Tom spoke up. He was one of Harry's next-door neighbors, a young guy with a wife who was six months' pregnant. He had voted with Harry on every issue Harry had proposed. Some kind of hero worship, probably.

"That a boy, Tom," Harry said, patting him on the back. "You can't be squeamish in matters like this." The hard look all around again, longer this time until everyone became quiet.

God, he did that well, Sam thought. Harry had a knack for conveying hate in a stare. It was a dominant factor in his presiding over their meetings.

"Sam, Marv, Bert. It's a little easier for you fellas to say don't do it. But, hell, I live right across the street from that pigpen. Do you know what it's like to walk out of my house in the morning and see that?"

Harry paused, shook his head. "Naw, forget about *me*. Think about yourselves. Think about what that place is doing to *your* property values. Sure we all moved in thinking she wouldn't be around long. But she's still here, and she's costing us money.

"Now, let's take a vote. I say we burn it," he said, striking the table again.

"Burn it," Tom said.

"Burn it," others echoed.

Right down the line the other members voted. Harry and his all-powerful stare were working their magic.

When it was over, Sam was the only one who had voted against Harry. He had gone along with Harry on nearly everything else concerning the block club—the amount of the dues, the type of Christmas decorations; but this was different.

"Okay, the ayes have it," Harry said. "We go tonight."

It just can't be that easy. "What's wrong with you peo-

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ple?" Sam asked. "Has anyone thought about Mrs. Okeckie?"

"Hell, Sam, I wasn't going to let her go up with the house," Harry said. "We start the fire first, then one of us will pretend we were passing by, saw it, and go in and get her out."

"That doesn't satisfy me, Harry."

"I don't give a damn whether it satisfies you or not. We took a vote. The vote stands." Harry was speaking even louder than usual.

"We should have another try at talking to her," Sam said.

"No."

"Another try wouldn't hurt," Marv suggested.

"Yeah, why not?" Bert added.

Harry sat with his fists clenched in front of him. Sam was expecting him to start pounding on the table again, but he didn't.

"Okay," Harry said. "One more try, and you can make it, Sam. I want you right back when you finish talking to her. No hedging around. You're not going to do any better than I did. I'll take care of the house myself, so the rest of you fellas can expect to hear the fire engine around nine tonight."

That was the way the meeting had ended. The other members had gone home and Sam had come across the street to the Okeckie house . . .

He pressed the bell, waited, pressed it again. He was not quite sure what he was going to say to her. He was still somewhat amazed he was here—amazed he had challenged Harry and won, even though this was only a partial victory.

The door opened. The woman standing there could have been anywhere from 70 to 80 years old. The dress she wore was floor-length, pink in color, but dirty and wrinkled. The style might have been popular about the mid-thirties. She was short and stout, yet looked frail about the face, with deep lines at the corners of her eyes and mouth. Her dull-gray hair was unkempt. He wondered when she had combed it last.

"Mrs. Okeckie, I'm Sam Tolen from the block club."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Tolen," she said, smiling. "You have that beige house down the street, the one with the twin boys. I've often watched them play from my bedroom upstairs. You have a lovely family."

"Thank you," he said, surprised at first that she knew so much about him. But what else would a lonely old woman do with her day except sit at her window and watch the antics of her neighbors?

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On her invitation he followed her into the house. There were no lights on in the front room. The only illumination came from the sun's rays through the dirt-streaked windows and torn curtains. He could see well enough, however, to detect the dust in the corners of the room, on the furniture, and on the pictures that hung crookedly on the walls.

She offered him a seat and he sat down on a wood-framed couch with lumpy cushions covered with a dingy old chintz.

"Would you care for some tea, iced perhaps?" she asked.

"No, thanks," he replied, and she sat on a chair opposite him.

"I'm not quite sure how to begin, Mrs. Okeckie," he admitted. He did not want to come on too strong. Belligerence was probably the approach Harry had taken.

"If it's the same thing your Mr. Brent requested, I can only tell you no, as I did him. Actually he frightened me some with his visit last night. I even threatened to call the police to get rid of him."

He nodded. "Harry has a rough manner at times. But this is something he feels strongly about, and he doesn't control his emotions too well."

He wondered if she accepted his explanation, if it was enough to erase the bad impression Harry had made. But he could not tell by the look on her face. There was no frown or smile to give him any indication.

"Mrs. Okeckie," he started, speaking softly, slowly, "I hope you realize that we in the block club are proud of our homes. And quite frankly the only thing that keeps us from extending that pride to the block as a whole is your house."

"I am not unaware of the contrast my home offers to the others on the block, Mr. Tolen."

"Then may I ask why you've done nothing? Is it money? Maybe the members of the club can chip in and have the work done for you. Or we probably can do most of it ourselves. Some of the guys are pretty handy."

She smiled. "Well, your Mr. Brent never offered to have the work done for me, but again I must say no. It's not the money. I have enough to last me for my needs." She stood. "If you come with me, perhaps I can give you a better explanation."

She led him through a small hallway to a back room, flipping the wall switch as she went in. The room contained a rack of men's clothing, some

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large trunks, and three tables piled with boxes and cylinders. On the walls were huge posters, faded with age. They proclaimed the arrival of Oscar Okeckie, World's Greatest Magician. The dates ranged from the mid-twenties to the late fifties.

"Oscar was my husband," she said, and he noticed a change in her voice.

"He died just ten years ago." She was walking among the tables, rearranging the objects on them. "You should have seen him, Mr. Tolen. He was good. I first saw him in 1923, when he came through my home town."

Suddenly she laughed. "He wasn't looking for a wife then, but when he left he had one. This was our first and only home. This old place holds a lot of memories. Our daughter was born here, and died here a year later of pneumonia."

She paused a moment, smiled, but her eyes were watering. "That old stump out front. Oscar cut the tree down. Its branches were getting too close to the house. But he cut it wrong and it fell on the house anyway. Cost a thousand dollars to get the house fixed. We used to laugh about that sometimes." Another pause, a deep breath. "He died here also—a heart attack, the doctor called it. He just went to bed one night and never got up.

"It was then I decided about the upkeep of the house. We were all we had left—the house had me, and I had the house. I wanted the two of us to grow old together, until the day we'll be with Oscar and our daughter, a family again."

She came up to him, clasped his hands in hers; the stain of tears was on her cheeks. "Does that sound strange to you, Mr. Tolen? Do you understand? I tried to explain to Mr. Brent, but he seemed only to hear what he was saying."

"I understand," he told her, wanting to tell her more. He wanted to comfort her, to assure her that she would not be bothered by the block club any longer, but he could not give that promise.

"I told you you wouldn't get anywhere with that old witch," Harry said. They were in Harry's basement again.

"At least I got some sense out of this whole thing." The idea of burning Mrs. Okeckie out had been sickening to Sam in the first place; now that he had met her it was even more repugnant.

"How fast do you think it will take that old dump to go up?" Harry asked, tossing a box of stick matches into the air.

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Sam swung and knocked the matches away before they fell back into Harry's hand. "You're not going to do it."

"You little punk," Harry muttered, and hit Sam in the stomach.

The pain was like a shock wave, billowing out from the point of impact to other parts of his body. He was doubled over, both hands holding his stomach, when Harry slapped him hard across the face. That spun him around, knocking him to the floor.

Harry knelt beside him, grabbed him by his collar and lifted him up, their faces inches apart. "I'm going to burn it, Sam. The club voted for it. It's going to happen. We haven't got any room on this block for anyone who doesn't go along with the club. Remember that, remember it good. That Okeckie dame doesn't have to be the only one who gets burned out."

He avoided Alice and the boys when he got back home, going straight to the bathroom. He took a bromo, hoping it would ease his stomach, and applied a cold washcloth to his jaw. He succeeded in keeping his jaw from swelling, although it was a little reddish, but the bromo did him no good.

From the bathroom he went to his den, laid out the blueprints of the Randler contract, and started checking the specifications. He measured the same room three times, getting different figures each time. He could not concentrate on specifications when he was thinking about Mrs. Okeckie.

She was not asking for much. She only wanted to live out her life in her own way. But her way was infringing on others. That house really should not be on his block. He liked his home, and most of his neighbors. Why should he allow Mrs. Okeckie to make him lose all this? It would be good for all of them when her house was gone, things would be all right then. There would not be any outsiders among the club members. A lot of good things could then be done for the block.

He did not have lunch, but stayed in the den working on the blueprints. He had the radio on, and a couple of times a newscaster interrupted with a report of a possibly severe storm by nightfall.

He was not sure when his stomach stopped hurting, or when he became engrossed in his work. He only knew that by the time Alice told him dinner was ready he had no more pain.

He was halfway through dinner when he realized he had been arguing with Alice and the

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boys. The boys had stopped talking and were looking at him, seemingly taking great care not to drop any food on the table. Alice sat there, shaking her head slightly, saying nothing. She did not like to argue in front of the kids.

He excused himself and went back to the den. He knew what was wrong. Mrs. Okeckie and her house. There was nothing he could do, nothing he wanted to do. No, that was not right. There was nothing he had the guts to do . . .

8:30.

8:45. Harry was proabably leaving his house right now.

8:50.

9:00.

9:01.

He could not let it happen! He ran out of the house, not telling Alice he was leaving. It was quiet outside, no one was in the street. The others were following Harry's instructions, waiting at home for the sound of the fire engine.

Harry had just emptied a gallon can of gasoline against the back of the house when Sam arrived, and the smell of gasoline was filling the air. Harry tossed the empty can to the ground, took from his shirt pocket the box of matches.

Harry grinned at him. "Welcome to the block party"—and he lit a match.

He rushed Harry, going for the hand that held the match. But Harry side-stepped him, tripping him as he went by. He fell headlong onto the ground, rolled, got to his feet. Too late. The match had arched through the air, landing on the gasoline and igniting it.

He cursed Harry, charging him, swinging. Harry blocked the punch, pinning his arms to his sides. Holding him there at arm's length, he looked down at him, still grinning. "You don't learn too fast, do you, Sam? I can give you another lesson now, or you can go in there and pull that old bag out."

The fire was spreading fast. It seemed to have engulfed the entire back of the house. Sam could feel the heat of the flames, smell the smoke as it whirled about them.

"Damn you, Harry! Let me go, I'll get her."

Laughing, Harry released him. As he ran to the front of the house he could hear Harry laughing behind him.

He tried the knob, found the door unlocked, and rushed in. It was black inside. He fumbled along the wall until he found the light switch, but it did not work. He called out to her. His only reply was the crackling of the fire.

He bumped into tables, chairs, calling out to her again

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and again. He found his way down the hall to the room she had taken him to. She was not there either. The smoke was getting thick, making him cough, forcing him away from the rear of the house.

He called out to her again. No answer. He reached the stairs and found her in the second room he tried.

There was enough light coming in from the street lamp so that he could see her quite well. She lay in bed with her eyes closed, smiling. He touched her, and she was cold. He guessed she had been dead for several hours. She had probably died not long after he had spoken to her.

She looked contented, smiling that way. Perhaps she was with her husband and daughter now. He thought about moving her, taking her body out of the house, but decided against it. She had wanted the house and herself to grow old together, to die together.

The fire had reached the railing and was creeping into the front room as he ran down the stairs and out of the house. He stopped in the street and looked back. Flames had swallowed up the house, thick black smoke was pluming into the night.

He felt a sudden gust of wind.

It was morning when the last fire engine left. He stood in front of the rubble that was his home and watched the firemen drive away. Alice and the boys, like most of the wives and children, were at the neighborhood church. Others were with friends or relatives.

How strange it had been. The wind, as if by pattern, had carried the fire to every house on the block. Nothing had remained intact—a partial wall here and there, a charred frame or two. He saw Harry down the street, standing in the midst of what was left of his home, his head bowed.

Damn Harry! It had been all his fault. If Harry had not persisted in burning Mrs. Okeckie out, if the others had not gone along, if he had only tried to stop Harry sooner . . . Where could he really place the blame?

The pattern of the wind did not seem so strange to him any more.

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a detective-crime "thriller" by

CORNELL WOOLRICH

Another highly charged, emotionally packed, suspense-filled detective novelet by the late Cornell Woolrich . . .

At one point Inspector Burke thought: "Why, there was no difficulty about this case, it was a pushover." But Inspector Burke was never more wrong. The beautiful Princess—was she guilty or innocent? "The scales remained evenly balanced and counterbalanced, to the last hair's-breadth milligram. Only one grain more had fallen on one side . . ."

ONLY ONE GRAIN MORE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

He sent his card in to me. We don't get much of that down at Headquarters. Any, you might say. They're either dragged in, or, if they come of their own accord, they just say who they are by word of mouth. What was on it made me raise my brows.

Arnoldo, Prince of Iveria

With a crown over it. We don't get much of *that*, either, down at Headquarters. I was so impressed I even talked it over with Crawley, who happened to be in the room at the time, before I did anything about having him shown in. Sort of trying to get my bearings.

"What the hell do you suppose a blueblood like this could want? And he comes to us in person instead of sending for us to come to him!"

"I suppose the family rubies have been stolen," Crawley snickered.

"In the first place, is he a real prince or a phony?"

"There is a party by that name," Crawley told me. "I've seen it in the papers once or twice. Wait a minute, I can check, so we'll be that much ahead."

He seemed to know how to go about it; I wouldn't have

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myself. He called *Who's Who*, and also some very swank club, and managed to find out what we wanted, without letting on we were the police. "Get a description while you're at it," I said over his shoulder.

When he got through he said, "The genuine article is about twenty-nine, nearly six feet tall, lean, and light-haired; looks more English than Latin."

The cop who had brought in the card nodded vigorously and said, "That's who's waiting out there right now."

"All right, then we don't have to worry about phonies," I said, relieved.

"Here's a thumbnail sketch of the rest of it," Crawley said. "His own country don't exist any more, it was annexed by another country. He's married to an American girl, the former Marilyn Reid. Scads of dough. Her grandfather first invented chocolate bars with peanuts in 'em. They live out at Eastport."

"That ought to do. I hate to have to ask a lot of fool questions with a guy like this. Better not keep him waiting any more, O'Dare."

I was almost stage-frightened by this time. I straightened the knot of my tie, polished the toe of my shoe against the opposite trouser leg, sat down and arranged a lot of papers in front of me, like I was up to my ears in work. "How does this look?" I asked Crawley nervously.

"Phony as hell—to me," he grinned. "But he won't know the difference."

The cop held the door open and there was one of those breathless waits, like in a play on the stage. He came in on a cane. For a minute I thought it was just swank, but then I could see he seemed to need it. A little shaky on his legs.

I didn't know how to address him, so I didn't. Just nodded.

Maybe he didn't know how to address me either, because he nodded back. He said, "Do you mind if I sit down? I'm not—very strong."

Crawley slid a chair up, and I said, "Sorry we kept you waiting—"

"I don't mind. You see, I had to come to you myself. If I'd sent for you it would have defeated the purpose—for which I've come to you."

I said, "What can we do for you, your highness?"

He shook his head. "There are no highnesses here. I am taking out my first papers next month. But of course I won't live to become a full-fledged citizen—"

I looked at Crawley and he looked at me.

Iveria had taken out a hammered-gold cigarette case

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with a sapphire clasp. I thought, to smoke, but he didn't open it, just passed it to me. "I may not be able to prevent it coming out that I stopped in here. In which case I shall say that I came in to report the loss of this case. So suppose you keep it in the meantime, as an excuse. Let us say some honest person found it and turned it in. You are holding it for me. That will explain my visit here. Is that all right with you?"

I could have told him that I was a Homicide man, not the Lost and Found Department, but I didn't. "If you want it that way, yes," I said uncertainly. Again Crawley and I exchanged a look.

"Now, as to what I have actually come here about"—he looked from one to the other of us—"I am sorry, but I don't intend to speak about it before more than one person. I want this held confidential between myself and just one detective or police official. Until the time comes for this one official to act upon what I have told him today. Then let the whole world know. I will be gone by then, anyway. Now—can that be arranged?"

I didn't answer him right away.

He went on, "It is very painful; it is very personal; it is so subtle it will require a man of acute perception and great tact."

I said, "Well, would you care to tell Crawley here? He's very perceptive and tactful."

He took just one look at him, then he turned back to me. "You have just shown yourself to be the more tactful of the two, by the very fact that you recommended him. You are the man I would like to tell this to, if I may."

"I'm at your disposal," I said.

Crawley took it in good part. He said, "See you later," and eased out.

"And now—"

"Inspector Burke."

"And now, Inspector Burke . . ." He opened his fluffy llama wool coat, took a thick manila envelope soldered with sealing wax out of its inner pocket. "This is an affidavit, duly notarized, which merely restates what I am about to tell you. It will bear more weight later than a verbal accusation, particularly after I am no longer alive. You will put it away, please, until the time comes for you to use it. Write your own name on it; show it to no one."

I scrawled *Burke, in re Iveria* across it, went over and put it in the safe, along with the cigarette case. Then I came back and waited for him to begin.

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He made a steeple of his hands. "Now it is a very simple matter. Stated in its simplest form—which, however, does not do it justice—it is merely this: I am about to be killed by my wife. But without me you will not be able to prove that she did such a thing."

"I won't have to prove it, I'll prevent it—" I started to say.

He flexed his hand at me almost indifferently. "No, neither you nor I will be able to prevent it. It will surely happen. Nothing will be able to prevent it. For it is coming in such a small way. So, for all practical purposes, let us say I am already dead."

"We don't go along in things like that here—" I started to say, but again he overrode me.

"But it is not right that she should do such a thing and remain unpunished, isn't it so? Or at least enjoy the fruits of her crime, enjoy peace of mind afterwards—with *him*. That is why I have come to you ahead of time. Even so, you will have a difficult time proving it. Without me, you would never even be able to establish it *was* a murder."

I just sat there eying him unblinkingly. Whatever else I was, I wasn't bored. He had the gift of holding you spellbound. Once the desk phone rang and I switched the call into another room without even trying to find out what it was.

"Here is the background, so you will understand the thing fully," he went on. "You must realize that it is difficult for me to speak of these things to another man. But for present purposes you are not a man, you are a police official—"

I considered that a dubious compliment at best, but I let it go.

"—so I will hold nothing back. I am descended from a branch of the ruling house of what was formerly Iveria. I therefore bear in my veins both the assets and the liabilities of royalty." He smiled ruefully when he said that, I noticed.

"I met my wife, the former Marilyn Reid, three years ago in St. Moritz and we were married there. She was supposedly enormously wealthy; both parents dead, sole heiress to the Reid peanut-bar fortune. I have seen American papers which thought it was one of those usual fortune-hunting matches, and didn't hesitate to say so. I gave her the title, for what it was worth, she gave me the use of her money. As a matter of fact, it was quite the other way around. I was the wealthier by far, even at the time of our marriage.

"On the other hand, through bad management and her own

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extravagance, the enormous estate that had come down to Marilyn from her grandfather was already badly depleted at the time I first met her, and since then has dwindled away to nothing. Naturally, that isn't commonly known. Even if it were, it wouldn't be believed.

"The point is, I did not marry Marilyn for her money. When you see her face you won't have to be told why I did: she was the most beautiful girl in Europe, and she still is the most beautiful in America today. Try to keep in mind—when the time comes—that she murdered me. It won't be easy to do so.

"The rest is rather shabby. I will hurry over it as quickly as I can. I am ill; she married only a shadow of a man. But when a thing is once mine, I keep it. If she wanted freedom only for herself, I would give it to her. But she wants it for this—this automobile speed-racer.

"In Cannes we met this 'Streak' Harrison. She'd always had a mania for breakneck driving herself, so that gave him a good head start. What is there about boxers, airplane pilots, racers, that makes women lose their heads? After we'd been back six months and he had 'casually' turned up over here himself, she asked me for her freedom. I said no.

"She was tied hand and foot, the decision rested with me, and it has brought murder into her heart. She could not buy me off—*I* had the fortune, and she no longer had a dime of her own by that time. She could not get a divorce, because divorce is not recognized in Iveria, and my entire estate is there. Nor could she have it annulled on the grounds of my hereditary disability. I took pains to warn her of that before our marriage, and there are documents in existence to prove that. She went into the marriage with her eyes open.

"I am the last of my line. As my widow—but only as my widow—she would be sole inheritor under Iverian law.

"Now we come to my imminent murder. My affliction is hemophilia, the disease of kings. You know what that is." I did, but he went on to illustrate, anyway. "Once the blood begins to flow, there is no checking it. There is imminent death about me all day long. Things which to you are simply an 'Ouch!' and a suck at the finger, to me can mean death. For instance, I am sitting here in this office with you. There is a nail on the underpart of this chair. I touch it—so—and accidentally make a little puncture on the pad of my finger. Within a few hours,

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if they can't find a way of stopping it, I am done for."

"Don't do that again, will you?" I said, white-faced. I knew that chair, and there *was* a nail under it; Crawley had torn his pants on it once.

He smiled; he saw that he'd got his point across.

"But are you sure she contemplates actual murder, Iveria?"

"If I weren't, do you think I would be here?"

"Let me ask you something. Is she a stupid woman, your wife?"

"She is one of the most keen-witted, diabolically clever women who ever lived."

"Then why should she risk murder? Granting that she wants to be rid of you, wants to marry this Harrison and at the same time enjoy your ancestral fortune, all she needs is a little patience. As you yourself said a few minutes ago, you bear imminent death with you all day long. All she has to do is sit back and wait—"

"You forget something. I have lived with this blood curse all my life. I know how to guard against it, take care of myself. If you or anyone else were suddenly afflicted with it, you would probably do something that would cause your death within the first twenty-four hours; you wouldn't be used to taking precautions against it. That is the difference between us. I avoid angles and sharp-edged or pointed things. I have my hair singed instead of clipped, my nails sandpapered instead of filed. I don't dance on waxed floors or walk about my bedroom barefoot, and so on.

"My father lived to fifty, my grandfather to sixty-four, and both had it. I have lived twenty-nine years with it. What is to prevent my living another twenty-nine? Another thing: she knows that so far, until now, she stands to inherit automatically, under Iverian law, in case of my death. She cannot be sure that tomorrow I will not give away my entire estate to charity or deed it to the state, a privilege which is mine while I am still alive."

That did put a different slant on it; he was winning me over. But I still had to be sure. "In this setup you have outlined," I said, speaking slowly, "there is invitation enough to murder. But what actual proof have you that she intends doing it?"

"I thought you would ask that, as a police official," he smiled wryly. "I cannot give you phonograph records on which she says at the top of her voice 'I will kill him!' I can only give you little things which show the way the wind blows.

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Tiny, trifling things. Each one in itself meaning nothing. But added to one another over a period of time, meaning—murder. That is why I said I wanted to tell this to someone who was acutely perceptive, who does not need a brick wall to fall on his head before he senses something.

"Well, at random, here are some of these trifling things—and I am leaving out as many as I am recalling. When this Streak first came back here from Europe he seemed very anxious to enjoy my company. He kept asking me to go out driving in his car with them. Since they loved each other, I couldn't understand why he should be concerned with my being present. I unexpectedly agreed one day, simply to find out what it was about. At once a sort of tension came over the two of them. She gave some lame excuse at the last moment, to get out of going with us; apparently it was not part of their plan for her to endanger herself.

"I figured the route he would take, stepped back in the house a moment just as we were ready to leave, and phoned ahead to a gas-station attendant Marilyn and I both knew. When we reached there he was to tell Streak there'd been a call for him—from a lady—and he was to wait there until she called back. He'd think it was Marilyn of course.

"The mechanic flagged us and Streak fell for it. While he was in the office waiting, I said to the attendant, 'Check this car and find out what's the matter with it.' And I got out and stood clear while he was doing it.

"He went over it quickly but expertly, and when he got through he said, 'It's in fine condition, I can't find anything wrong with it.' Then he took his cloth and, from long habit, began polishing the windshield. It fell through the frame and shattered all over the front seat where I'd been until then. The little clamps that held it to the frame had all been unnoticeably loosened, so that any unusual pressure or impact—he would have braked abruptly somewhere along the way, or grazed a tree or a wall or another car—just enough to give it that little shaking out.

"He would have been with me, of course. Maybe he would have even been more hurt than I was. But he could afford a few bloody nicks and gashes. I couldn't. I went back to our place on foot and left him there in the office still waiting for that nonexistent call. I didn't say a word to her, simply said I was not used to being kept

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waiting at the roadside by anyone. They couldn't tell if I knew or didn't know.

"But that ended his participation, gave him cold feet. He never came around again. I've never seen him since. I know he's lurking there unseen in the background, waiting for her to do the job and give him the all-clear signal. He may be reckless on the speedway, but he has no stomach for murder.

"All the remaining attempts have come from her. More trivial even than that, as befits the feminine genius. So subtle that—how shall I repeat them to you and make them sound like anything?"

"Let me be the judge," I murmured.

"The other night she attempted to embrace me, wound both arms about my neck. A caress, surely? But the gesture was false, had no meaning any more between us, so I quickly warded it off in the nick of time—for that reason alone. What death lurked in that innocent sign of affection?

"Then I noticed a heavy bracelet that didn't seem to close properly on her wrist. Its catch was defective, stuck up like a microscopic spur, needed flattening. What could it do to anyone else but graze them, inflict a tiny scratch? 'Ouch!' 'Oh, I'm sorry, dear, I'll kiss it away.' 'Forget it.' But to me it would have brought death. Strange that only on the night she was wearing that particular ornament did she try to hug me tightly around the neck. The night before, and the night after, she didn't come near me."

He stopped and looked at me. "More?"

"A little more. I'll tell you when to stop."

"In a hundred ways she has tried to draw the single drop of blood from me that will eventually bring death in its wake. She brought a cat into the house, a pedigreed Persian. Yet I happen to know that she hates animals herself. Why a cat, then? I soon found out." He shrugged. "You know the feline propensity for stalking, and finally clawing at anything moving? I sat reading one night before the fire, with the cat there, and finally dozed off, as she must have hoped I would. I opened my eyes just in time to find the cat crouched at my feet, tail lashing warningly, about to spring.

"My arm was hanging limp over the side of the chair. The cat's claws would have raked it in a half dozen places. A loose piece of string was traveling up my arm, drawn from behind the chair. Luckily there was a cushion behind me. I just had

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time enough to swing it out in front of me, use it as a buffer. The cat struck it, gashed it to ribbons.

"When I stood up and turned, she was behind me, holding the other end of the string she had used to bait the cat. What could I say? 'You tried to kill me just then'? All she seemed to be doing was playing with the cat. Yet I knew she had tried; I knew she must have kept flinging out that piece of string again and again until it trailed across my arm as she wanted it to.

"Whom could I tell such a thing to—and expect to be believed? What bodyguard, what detective, can protect me against such methods?"

He was right about that. I could have sent someone back with him to protect him against a gun, a knife, poison. Not against a woman playing with a cat or twining her arms about his neck. "Why don't you leave her, then? Why don't you get out while there is still time? Why stay and wait for it to happen?"

"We Iverias don't give up the things we prize that easily."

That left me kind of at a loss. Here was a man who knew he was going to be murdered, yet wouldn't lift his little finger to prevent it. "Any more?"

"What is the use of going ahead? I have either convinced you by the few examples I have given or there is no hope of my ever convincing you."

"And now just what is it you want me to do?"

"Nothing. When it happens—maybe tomorrow, maybe next week—I will call you, while I still have the strength left, and say, 'This is it.' But even if I fail to, be sure that it is 'it.' You will read in the papers, within a day or two after that, that the Prince of Iveria died from hemophilia. Some slight mishap in the home. A pin had been left in his freshly laundered shirt.

"There isn't a living soul in the whole world, physician or layman, who will believe such a thing *could* have been murder. But you will know better, Inspector Burke, you will know better after what I have told you today.

"Take my affidavit out of your safe, go up there, and arrest her. Force the issue through, so that she has to stand trial for it. Probably she will not be convicted. That doesn't matter. The thing will be brought out into the open, aired before the whole world. His name will be dragged into it. Convicted or acquitted, I will have succeeded in what I set out to do. *She cannot marry him* or go near him, after I am

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gone, without branding herself a murderess in the eyes of the world."

"So that's it," I said softly.

"That's it. He can't have her and she can't have him. Unless they are willing to go through a living hell, become outcasts, end by hating each other. In which case they have lost each other anyway. I am the Prince of Iveria. What once belongs to me I give up to no other man."

He'd said his say and had no more to say. He stood up and stretched out his hand to me.

"Goodbye, Inspector Burke. We shall probably not see each other again. Your job is to punish murder. See that you don't fail. You'll do what I've asked you to?"

What could I do? Go up there and arrest her to prevent it? On what charge? Wearing a bracelet with a catch that needed repairing? Playing with a pet cat in the same room he happened to be in? True, he was almost seeking the thing instead of trying to ward it off. But I couldn't compel him to move out of his own home if he didn't want to. If murder was committed, even though he made no move to avoid it, even though he met it halfway, that didn't make it any the less murder.

He kept looking at me, waiting for my answer.

I nodded gloomily at last, almost against my will. "I'll do whatever the situation calls for."

He turned and went slowly out through the doorway with the aid of his cane, stiffly erect, just leaning a little sideways. I never saw him alive again.

It came quicker than I'd expected. Too quickly for me to be able to do anything to prevent it. I'd intended paying a visit up there in person, trying to introduce myself into the establishment in some way, to see if I could size up the situation at first hand, form my own conclusions. He hadn't given me any *physical* evidence, remember, that she was attempting to murder him. All right, granting that he couldn't give me physical evidence—the very nature of the setup forbade it—he still hadn't convinced me one hundred percent. My own eyes and ears would have helped.

But before I had a chance it was already too late—the thing was over.

The second day after his visit, at nine in the morning, just after I'd got in to Headquarters, I was hailed. "Inspector Burke, you're wanted on the phone."

I picked it up and a woman's voice, cool and crisp, said,

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"Inspector Burke, this is the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital at Eastport. We have a patient here, the Prince of Iveria, who would like to speak to you."

I waited, squeezing the life out of the thing. There were vague preparatory sounds at the other end. He must have been very weak already. I could hardly hear him at first. Just a raspy breathing sound, like dry leaves rustling in the wind. They must have been holding him up. I said, "I can't hear you!"

Then he got words through. Four of them. "Burke? This is it."

I said, "Hello! Hello!" He'd hung up.

I called right back. I couldn't get him again. Just got the hospital switchboard. They wouldn't clear the call. The patient was in no condition to speak further to anyone, they told me. He was—dying.

"You've got to put me through to him again! He was just on the line, so how can an extra thirty seconds hurt?"

Another wait. The hospital operator came back again. "The patient says there is nothing further to be said." *Click.*

If ever a man embraced death willingly, you might even say exultantly, it was he.

I grabbed my hat, grabbed a cab, and went straight to the hospital. Again the switchboard operator blocked me. She plugged in, plugged out. "Sorry, no one can go up. The Prince of Iveria is in a coma—no longer conscious. I'm afraid there's not much hope left."

That cooled me off. If he couldn't talk there wasn't much use in my going up. I said, "I'll wait," and hung around in the lobby for the next two hours, having her ring up at intervals to find out. There was always a chance he might rally. What I wanted to hear from him was: *had* she done it or hadn't she? True, the implication of 'This is it' was she had; he'd warned me that was all he was going to say when the time came, but I had to have more than that.

Probably the only material witness there would ever be against her was slipping through my fingers. I didn't have a nail left intact on my ten fingers, the marble flooring on my side of the reception foyer was swimming with cigarette butts, by the time the two hours were up. I must have driven the poor switchboard girl half crazy.

Twice, while I was waiting, I saw rather husky-looking individuals step out of the elevator. They were both too hale-looking to be hospital cases themselves. One was counting over a small wad of bills, the second hitching at his sleeve, as

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though his arm were tender. Without knowing for sure, I had a good hunch they were donors who had been called in for blood transfusions.

The operator tried his floor once more, but he was still unconscious, so it looked as though it hadn't helped. Even my badge wouldn't have got me up—this was a hospital, after all—but I didn't want to use it, in any event.

At ten to two that afternoon the elevator door opened and *she* came out—alone. I saw her for the first time. I knew it must be she. He'd said she was the most beautiful girl in Europe or America. He needn't have left out Asia or Africa. She was the most beautiful human being I'd ever seen anywhere in my life. The sort of a face that goes with wings and a halo.

She was all in black, but not the black of mourning—yet—the black of fashion. She wasn't crying, just looking down at the floor as if she had a lot to think about. So at least she was no hypocrite; I gave her that much.

As she moved through the foyer the nurse at the switchboard followed her with her eyes, a pair of question marks in them that couldn't be ignored. She—Iveria's wife—felt their insistence finally, looked over at her, nodded with a sort of calm sadness. About the same degree of melancholy tha would go with the withering o a pet plant in one's garden.

So he'd died.

I didn't accost her, didn't d anything about it right then She wasn't some fly-by-nigh roadhouse hostess that you gra while the grabbing's good; sh would always be where I coul reach her. The patrimony of th House of Iveria, immovabl fixed in the ground, in mines farms, forests, castles, woul see to that. If she'd done it there was plenty of time. If sh hadn't there was even mor time than plenty.

She went out through th revolving door to a car waitin for her. Nobody else was in i but the driver. It skimmed awa like a bolt of satin bein unrolled along the asphalt.

The switchboard operato turned to me and whisperec unnecessarily, "He's dead."

It was up to me now, I wa on my own. All I had was th valueless memory of a conversa tion, and an almost equall valueless affidavit, deposed before the event itself. And m own eyes and ears and good judgment, for whatever they were worth.

There had been a pyramidal hierarchy of medical experience in attendance on him, as was to be expected, but I didn't bothe

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ith the lower strata. I took a ort cut straight to the apex nd singled out the topmost an. I did it right then and ere, as soon as I'd seen her ave the hospital.

His name was Drake, and e'd treated everyone promi- ent who'd ever had it, which eant he got about one patient very five years. And could live icely on it, at that, to give you rough idea.

I found him in a small leasant lounge reserved for the octors on the hospital staff—it as a private institution—on the ame floor where Iveria had just ied, but well insulated from he hospital activities around it. Ie was having a glass of hampagne-and-bitters and moking a Turkish cigarette, to elp him forget the long-drawn- ut death scene he'd just ttended.

I didn't make the mistake of hinking this was heartlessness. could tell it wasn't, just by ooking at him. He had a ensitive face, and his hands vere a little shaky. The loss of he patient had affected him, ither professionally or per- onally, or both.

He thought I was a reporter t first, and wasn't having any. 'Please don't bother me right ow. They'll give you all the ecessary details at the informa- ion desk." Then when he understood I was police, he still couldn't understand why there should be any police interest in the case. Which didn't surprise me. Whatever the thing was, I had expected it to look natural. Iveria had warned me it would—so natural I might never be able to break it down.

I didn't give him an inkling of what my real purpose was. "This isn't police interest in the usual sense," I glibly explained. "His highness took me into his confidence shortly before this happened, asked me to have certain personal matters carried out for him in case of his death. That's my only interest."

That cleared away the obstructions. "Wait a minute; is your name Burke?" He put down his champagne glass.

"That's right."

"He left a message for you. He revived for a moment or two, shortly before the end, whispered something to us. The nurse jotted it down." He handed me a penciled scrap of paper. "I don't know whether we got it right or not, it was very hard to hear him—"

It said: *Burke. Don't fail me. This is a job for you.*

Which was a covert way of saying *murder.* "Yes, you got it right," I assented gloomily, and put it in my pocket. "Was his wife present when he whispered this?"

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"Not in the room itself, in the outside room."

"Did she see it afterwards?"

"No. He muttered something that sounded like 'Nobody but him,' so we took that to mean he didn't want anyone but you to see it."

"That's right, he didn't."

"Sit down. Have some?" I shook my head. "Swell fellow, wasn't he? Practically doomed from the beginning, though. They always are with that. I tried transfusions, and I even tried this new cobra-venom treatment. Minute doses, of course. Very efficacious in some cases. Couldn't stop the flow this time, though. You see, that's the worst part of the hellish thing. It's progressive. Each time they're less able to resist than the time before. He was too weak by this time to pull through—"

He'd been under a strain, and he was going to work it off in garrulousness, if I didn't stop him; so I stopped him. I wasn't interested in the medical aspects of the case, anyway. There was only one thing I wanted. "What brought it on this time?"

"The lesions were all over his forehead and scalp. An unfortunate chain of trivialities led to an accident. They occupied adjoining bedrooms, you know. The communicating door was faced with a large mirror panel There was a reading chair in Iveria's room with a large bulky hassock to go with it, on which he habitually rested his feet. There was a bedside light which should have cast enough light to avoid what happened

"At any rate, he said he was awakened from a sound sleep by his wife's voice crying out a name; evidently she was being troubled by a bad dream. There was such terror in her voice, however, that he could not be sure it was just that, and not possibly an intruder. He seized a small revolver he habitually kept under his pillow, pulled the chain of the bedside light. It refused to go on; the bulb had evidently burned itself out since the last time it had been in use. The switch controlling the main overhead lights was at the opposite side of the room.

"He therefore jumped up without any lights, made for the mirror-door by his sense of direction alone, gun in hand. The reading chair and hassock should have been offside. The chair still was; the hassock had become misplaced and was directly in his path. It tripped him. There was not enough space between it and the mirror-faced door to give the length of his body clearance. His forehead struck the mirror, shattered it.

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"It would have been a serious accident for anyone—but not a fatal accident. None of the numerous little gashes was deep enough to require stitches. But he and his wife both knew what it meant to him and they didn't waste any time. She telephoned me in Montreal, where I was attending a medical convention, and I chartered a plane and flew right back. But I doubt that I could have saved him even if I had been right in the same room with him when it happened. I had them remove him to the hospital and summon donors before I even started down. I gave him the first transfusion ten minutes after I arrived, but he failed to rally, continued sinking steadily."

I wasn't interested in the rest, only in what the original "mishap," the starting point, had been. I thanked him and left. This was going to be a tricky thing to sift to the bottom of. Acutely perceptive? You needed to be a magnetized divining rod to know what to do!

I opened the safe and read over his affidavit before I went to tackle her. The affidavit didn't bring anything new to the case, simply restated what he had said to me that day in the office, only at greater length and in more detail. The incident of the loosened windshield was there, the cat incident, and several others that he hadn't told me at the time.

". . . I, therefore, in view of the above, solemnly accuse my wife, Marilyn Reid d'Iveria, of having at various times sought to cause my death, by means of the affliction known to her to be visited upon me, and of continuing to seek to do so at the time this deposition is taken, and charge the authorities and all concerned that in case of my death occurring at any time hereafter during her continued presence in my house and proximity to me, to apprehend and detain the said Marilyn Reid d'Iveria with a view to inquiring into and ascertaining her responsibility and guilt for the aforesaid death, and of bringing just punishment upon her.

Arnoldo Amadeo
Manfredo d'Iveria"

With that final postscript tacked on, it was going to be damned effective. Enough to arrest her on, book her for suspicion of murder, and hold her for trial. What went on after that, in the courtroom, was none of my business.

I put it in my pocket and left to interview the party of the second part—the murderess.

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He'd been buried in the morning—privately—and I got out there about five that same afternoon. There was no question of an arrest yet, not on this first visit anyway, so I didn't bother looking up the locals, even though I was out of jurisdiction here. She could slam the door in my face if she wanted. She wouldn't, if she was smart. It wouldn't help her case any.

It was a much smaller place than I'd expected it to be. White stucco or sandstone or something. I'm not up on those things. I turned into the driveway on foot. It was dusk by now, and a couple of the ground-floor windows on the side were lighted; the rest of the house was blacked out.

There was a high-powered knee-high foreign sports car outside the entrance. It wasn't the one she had driven away from the hospital in. It looked like the kind of job that would belong to a professional auto racer—if he could afford it. I whistled soundlessly and thought: Already? It was almost too good to be true. Maybe this case wasn't going to be such a tough baby to crack after all. One sure thing, she was writing herself up a bad press, if things ever got as far as a jury, by doing this sort of thing. They should have at least let Iveria cool off before they got together.

It was probably the sight of the car that kept me from ringing for admittance right away, that sent me on a little cursory scouting expedition around to the side where those lighted windows were. She'd probably be sitting there all in black trying to look sorrowful, with him holding her hand trying to look consoling, and each one of them knowing the other was a liar.

When I got in line with them, I moved in close enough to come into focus. Just close enough, no closer. Then I stood stock-still there on the lawn. I couldn't believe what I saw.

It was her all right. She was dancing around the room in there, without a partner. The way you do when you're overjoyed, can't contain yourself. Arms stretched out wide in a gesture of release, waltzing, or at least swaying around. She was in a light tan dress, and it billowed out all around her as she went.

He was sitting there, watching her. I got my first look at him. He was dark-haired and broad-shouldered; that was about all I could tell from out where I was. I couldn't see much to him, just something to hang a Stetson on. Iveria's words came back to me. "What

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s there about boxers, plane ›ilots, auto racers, that makes vomen lose their heads?" He vas holding his head cocked at ı slight angle, with an air of ›roud ownership, as if to say, 'Isn't she lovely? Isn't she :ute?" To which my own :ommentary would have been, 'She's the cutest little murder-ess I've seen in ages."

If this was how she was the ıfternoon of the day he'd been ›uried, I couldn't help wonder-ng what she would be like a veek—or a month—afterward. Why, there was no difficulty ıbout this case, it was a ›ushover. I was only sorry I ıadn't brought out a warrant vith me, made arrangements vith the Eastport locals, and ;ot it over with then and there. Whether the crime could ever be proved or not was beside the ›oint. She was begging for ırrest if anyone ever was, just ›n grounds of public decency.

I strode around to the front ınd rang. Peremptorily. A maid ›pened the door. I said, "I want to see the Princess, or whatever she calls herself."

She'd received her orders ıhead of time. "She's not at ıome to anyone."

I felt like saying, "No, except to Barney Oldfield, Jr., in there." Instead I elbowed her aside without another word and walked down the hall to where they were. The open doorway of the room cut an orange notch across the corridor, and I turned right at it.

She'd just finished her solo dancing. She'd come to a stop before him, but her filmy tan skirt was still swinging around. She was leaning her face down toward him, a hand resting on either arm of his chair. Their lips were only inches apart, and in another minute—

I just stood there taking it in. Did I say she was beautiful? Double it in spades, and you're still short-suited. I couldn't understand why nature should go to town so over one face, and let the others all go hang.

She became aware of me, shot up and back like something released from a bowstring. He reared his head and turned and looked at me, round the back of his chair. She said, "Who are you?" with a sort of unintentional matter-of-factness that came from not raising her voice high enough to suit the situation.

"Sorry to intrude," I said. "I've come out here to see you. You're d'Iveria's widow, I believe?" I eyed the light tan dress she had on meaningfully.

"Yes, but people don't just walk in here . . ." She made a gesture toward some service button or other.

"That won't do any good," I

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said. "I came here to have a talk with you, and I'm having it."

The Harrison fellow got up at this point, ready to take part in the matter. He was taller than I'd thought. He must have had a hard time tucking away those legs in a racing car. He was just a kid, really. I mean, a kid of about twenty-seven. He was pretty clean-cut looking, too, for a—well, call it home wrecker or whatever you want. I was surprised. He looked like he drank milk with his meals, and when he wanted to paint the town red went to a movie with a bag of salted peanuts in his pocket.

He started toward me, biting off something about, "You'll have the talk when she's ready, and not before."

Suddenly something made her change her mind. Some second look at me, or, more likely, some unspoken thought in her own mind. She wanted the talk right away; it couldn't come fast enough. But without him; she didn't want him to have any part in it.

Her arm shot out, barring his way. "Don't, Streak," she said. "I think I know what this is about. You go now, will you? Call me later." And then to me, almost pleadingly: "It's me you want to speak to, isn't it? Not the two of us. It's all right if—if he goes now, isn't it?"

"Yourself'll do nicely," said ominously.

Harrison, who wasn't ver alert at grasping nuances (a sig of honesty, they say), couldn get off anything better tha "Well, but—"

She went into high gea edging and propelling hi toward the door. She ke throwing me appealing looks, a if begging me to keep quiet ju a minute longer until she coul get him out of the way. A least, that was the way translated them; I couldn't b sure. Meanwhile she was almo crowding him out into the hal saying disconnectedly: "You g now. I know what this is. It's a right, it's nothing. Call me late About ten?"

The only way I could figur it was, either she wanted t hang on to his good opinion o her as long as she could, or sh wanted to keep him in th clear, and, ostrich-like, though that by getting him out of her that would do it . . . or though she could handle me better if h wasn't around to cramp he style. One thing was plain: sh already knew what was coming And if she wasn't guilty, hov the hell could she have known Why should such an idea ever enter her head?

I let him go. It made th issue more clear-cut to dea with her alone. He hadn't beer

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ı the picture at all since the indshield incident, according) d'Iveria's own affidavit. I ɔuld always get him later, ıyway.

The last thing I heard her ıy, when she got him as far as ıe front door, was: "Get home l right. Don't drive too fast, treak. I'm always so worried ɔout those intersections along ıe way." That was sure love,) be able to think of such a ıing at such a time. Well, I ıppose even murderesses love ɔmeone.

She didn't come right back) the room. She called, "I'll be ght with you, officer," and ıen ran up the stairs before I ɔuld get out there and stop er. By the time I did, she was lready making the return trip own again. She hadn't been up ıere long enough to do any amage. She was holding a nall black folder in her hand. I ɔuldn't quite make out what it ras, except that it was no 'eapon of any sort.

We went back into the room 'here they had been originally. he was breathing rapidly from ıe energy she'd used just now ı maneuvering him and then ınning up and down the ;airs—or maybe it was from ɔme other cause entirely. eople's breathing quickens 'om fear, too.

She began with beautiful directness. "I know what you're going to say. I wanted to get him out of here before you said it. He would have come to blows with you, and got in trouble. I can handle it more tactfully. You're going to say I killed Arnold, aren't you? You're the police, aren't you? Only a detective would crash into a room the way you did just now. I suppose you looked through the windows first and saw me dancing, because I was happy he was gone. Well, if you didn't, that's what I was doing just before you got here, so now you know, anyway. May I see your credentials?"

I showed her my badge.

"I knew he was going to do this to me," she said. "Yes, I'm not wearing black. Yes, I'm glad he's gone; like a prisoner when his term is up." She had opened the little black folder while she was speaking, torn out a light-blue pad. She was writing something on it. "Do you mind giving me your name?" she said, without looking up.

"The name is Nothing-doing-on-that-stuff." I hitched the light-blue pad out from under the midget gold fountain pen she had point-down on it, so that the last zero—there were three after the '1'—streaked off in a long diagonal inkline across the face of it. "Keep it up," I said. "You're saving som-

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lawyer lots of hard work." I put it in my pocket; the blank check had Iveria's name printed on top, so it was almost as incriminating as if she'd signed it.

"Then there's nothing I can do or say that will—avert this thing, this thing he wanted to happen to me?"

"Not along those lines. What you can do and say, for the present, is sit down quietly and answer a question or two about your husband's death. Would you mind giving me the exact circumstances, in your own words?"

She calmed herself with a visible effort, sat down, lit a cigarette, and then forgot to smoke it. "I was asleep—"

"Do you recall having an unpleasant dream that caused you to cry out?"

She smiled. "One often doesn't, even if one did. The unpleasant dream, in my case, was during my waking hours, you see."

Trying to gain my sympathy, I thought warily. "That has nothing to do with it. Please go on."

"I heard a breakage sound that wakened me, I lit the light, I saw the communicating door move slowly inward and his hand trail after it on the knob. Opened inward, and he kept it locked on his side"—her eyelids dropped—"as if afraid of me a night. I found him attemptir to pick himself up, in a welt of glass shards. I saw a gu there on the floor behind hi that had spiraled from his han when he fell. I took it into m room and hid it in my dressir table—"

"Why?"

"We both knew he wa doomed. I was afraid that t avoid the pain, the lingerin death, he would take a quick way out."

Which would not look quit so much like an accident? addressed her silently. "That the whole sum and substance c the matter?"

"That's the whole sum an substance."

"May I see this room happened in?"

"Of course."

I followed her up the stair "The local authorities hav already examined it?"

"The local authorities hav already examined it."

I looked at her. Meanin you didn't have much troubl convincing *them*, did you? Sh understood the look an dropped her eyes.

The only vestiges remainin of the "accident" were th spokes of emptiness slashed ou of the mirror panel, in sun-ra formation. His head had struc it low; the upper two-third

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were still intact. The reading chair was out of the way, a good two to three yards offside. The hassock now sat directly before it, where it belonged.

"Is this the habitual position of this chair?" But I didn't really have to ask her that. The carpet was a soft plush that showed every mark; the chair had stood there a long time; its four supports had etched deep indentations into the nap. This was a mark against, not for, her. How could a bulky thing like that hassock move three yards away from where it belonged—unaided?

I asked her that; I said I wondered.

"I don't know," she said with an air of resigned hopelessness. "Unless he may have kicked it away from him, in getting up from the chair to go to bed."

I sat down in it, arched my legs to the hassock. I had to try it three times before I could land it all the way out in a line with the mirror-door. And I had stronger leg muscles; he'd had to walk with a cane. Still, he *could* have done it, in a burst of peevishness or boredom.

I looked the bedside light over next. It was just a stick with a bulb screwed in at the top and a shade clamped over that. I pulled the chain; the bulb stayed dark.

"How is it he would not have noticed this bulb was defective before getting into bed?" I wondered aloud for her benefit. "Isn't that what bedside lights are for, to be left on until the last?" The wall switch controlling the overheads was all the way across the room, beside the door leading out to the hall.

"I don't know; maybe he did." She shrugged with that same listless manner as before. "What would he want a new bulb for at that hour, if he was on the point of retiring for the night? He would have had to go downstairs for it himself, the help were all in bed by then. Or perhaps it was still in working order up to the time he turned it off. Bulbs have been known to die between the time they were last used and the next time they are turned on."

I removed the clamped shade. I tested the pear-shaped bulb gingerly. It vibrated slightly beneath my fingertips, I thought. I gave it a turn or two to the right. It responded. There should have been no give there, if it was fastened as tightly into the socket as it would go. Brilliant light suddenly flooded it.

The bulb was in perfectly good condition; it had simply been given a half turn or two to the left, to break the contact.

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I looked at her, keeping my hand on it for as long as I could stand the increasing heat. Her eyes dropped long before then.

"You say the communicating mirror-door was kept locked. Was the outside door, to the hall, also kept locked by your husband, do you know?"

"I believe it was," she said lifelessly. "I believe the butler, in whom my husband had the greatest confidence, used a special key to let himself in in the mornings. We were—rather a strange household."

I noticed an old-fashioned bell-pull there by the bed. I reached for it. She stopped me with a quick gesture. "I can give you the answer to what you are about to ask him; it will save time. He forgot his key that night, left it in the outside lock of the door after he had concluded his duties for the night. I noticed it there myself, and returned it to him the next day."

"Then anyone else in the house could—"

She wouldn't let me finish. "Yes, anyone else in the house could have entered my husband's room after he had gone to sleep. To do what? Give a bulb a turn so it wouldn't light? Shift a hassock out of place? Don't you think that would have been a foolish misuse of such an opportunity?"

"No, I don't!" I crackled at her. I couldn't have made it more emphatic if I'd tried. "If a knife had been left sticking in him, or a fine wire tightened around his throat, that would have been *murder*. But he died of an 'accident.' One little mishap leading to another." I drove the point home viciously. "You and I are agreed on that—he died of an 'accident'!" I dropped my voice. "And I'm here to find out who caused it."

She twined and untwined her fingers. "And I cannot defend myself." She shuddered. "It is not that the charge is so hard to prove; it's so hard to disprove. This is what he intended to happen. I saw the smile on his face even when I first found him lying there in the litter of glass. As if to say, 'This time I've got you.' I beg of you to do this much at least. Send for the maid who cleans this room. Don't ask her any questions about the bedside light, just test her. Just—well, let me do it, may I?"

I nodded, more on guard than ever. She yanked the bell-pull a certain number of times, had me replace the lampshade, lit a cigarette, and flicked ashes over the shade.

Within a few minutes a maid appeared—not the same one who had admitted me to the house originally. "Will you dust

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off the bedside light?" Iveria's wife said casually. "Don't take any extra pains, just do it as you would ordinarily."

The girl took a cloth from her waistband, took a swipe around the stick part. Then she began to swivel the cloth around the shade. She was left-handed; she moved the cloth from right to left. Not only that, but she held the lamp by the stick to steady it, so that the shade was not held fast at all and began to slip unnoticeably round a little under her ministrations. And the wire cleats that gripped the bulb moved with it, of course, turning the bulb a little in its socket.

"That will do." The girl stepped back. Iveria's wife said to me, "Try it now."

I jerked the chain-pull. The bulb failed to light.

She looked at me animatedly, hopefully.

"Very interesting," I said dryly. "You were pretty sure it would happen just that way, though, weren't you?"

I saw the hopefulness ebb out of her face little by little; her former listless resignation came back. "Oh, I see," she said quietly, "I'm supposed to have rehearsed her to do it just that way."

She stood up, smiling wanly. "Will you excuse me for a moment? You'll want to question her alone, I'm sure. And even if she tells you I haven't coached her about this lamp, you won't believe I didn't. There isn't really anything I can do or say. Arnold has won; he won in life, and now he's won in death."

She opened the mirror-door, stepped through to her own room, closed it behind her.

I said to the maid, "Do you always dust off lamps that vigorously?"

She looked undecided for a moment, finally confessed: "Only when someone's around to see. When no one's around . . ." She flicked the edge of her cloth at the lampshade and back to show me.

"Tell Mrs. Iveria I'd like to see her again, if she doesn't mind." The girl opened the door, went in there after her, closed it again.

I creased my eyes dissatisfiedly to myself. Every new fact that appeared on one side of the ledger brought its corollary on the opposite side. To a chartered accountant it might have been heaven, to a detective it was hell.

I wondered why she was taking so long to come out. I crossed to the mirror-door and threw it open without waiting, even though it led to a lady's

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room. You couldn't knock on the thing any more without risking bringing the rest of the glass out of its frame.

I didn't see them for a minute; they were over on the side of the room screened by the door, engaged in a breathless, utterly silent, almost motionless hand-to-hand deadlock over a winking little gun—I suppose the one she had taken from him the night of the accident.

I jumped in at them, caught the wrist holding it, turned the skin cruelly round. She dropped it and I caught it in my open palm. The maid stepped back and began to snivel.

I said, "Why didn't you call me, you little fool!"

"I did call you," the maid snuffled.

I pocketed the revolver and said to the girl, "We don't need you any more." And to Iveria's wife, "Come on downstairs." She followed me, white as a ghost.

"Do we go now?" she asked at the foot of the stairs.

"You don't suppose I'm going to leave you behind me out here, after what you just tried to do."

"That was a momentary impulse. It won't happen again. It wouldn't be fair to Streak. It would be giving Arnold his victory too cheaply."

We'd gone back to the room in which I'd first spoken to her.

"Sit down," I said curtly. "Give yourself time to quiet down first."

She looked at me hopelessly. "Is there anything I can do or say that will make you believe me? I had nothing to do with Arnold's death."

I didn't answer—which was answer enough.

"I don't suppose you believe that, do you?" I didn't answer. "You're positive I meant to kill Arnold, aren't you?" I didn't answer. "He saw to it that you would be. He went to you and told you the story, didn't he? Told it *his* way."

I didn't see any point in denying that; it was self-evident by the mere fact of my being there. "Yes, he did."

She let her head slowly droop forward, as if in admission of defeat. But then she raised it again a moment afterward, refusing the admission. "May I have the same privilege? May I tell the story *my* way?"

"You're going to have that privilege anyway, when the time comes."

"But don't you see it'll be too late by then? Don't you see this is a special case? The mere accusation in itself is tantamount to a conviction. One wisp of smoke, and the damage

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has been done. Streak and I can never live it down again—not if every court in the land finds insufficient evidence to convict us. That's what he wanted, to ruin the two of us—"

"But I'm just a detective. I'm not a judge—"

"But he only told it to you, no one else at the time—"

This did get a rise out of me. "How do you know that?" I said sharply.

"Dr. Drake showed me the dying message he had taken down; it had your name on it—'Burke.' It was addressed to you personally, no one else. It was easy to see he'd made you the sole repository of his confidence—until the time came to shout the charges from the rooftops. The evidence was too nebulous, there was no other way in which to do it."

"Tell it, then," I agreed.

She didn't thank me or brighten up; she seemed to know it would be hopeless ahead of time. She smiled wanly. "I'm sure the external details are going to be the same. He was far too clever to have changed them. He selected and presented each and every one of them so that I cannot deny them—on a witness stand, for instance—unless I perjure myself. It's their inner meaning—or rather the *slant* of the story—that he distorted."

I just sat and waited, noncommittal. I'd been through this once before.

"I met Arnold in St. Moritz and I felt vaguely sorry for him. Pity is a dangerous thing, so often mistaken for love. No one told me what was the matter with him."

Here was the first discrepancy. He'd said she knew ahead of time. And he'd said he had *documents* to prove it.

"He proposed to me by letter, although we were both at the same resort. He used the word 'hemophilia' in one of them, said he knew he had no right to ask me to be his wife. I'm not a medical student—I'd never heard the word before. I thought it was some minor thing, like low blood pressure or anemia. I felt the matter was too confidential to ask anyone; after all, the letter was a declaration of love. I wrote back, using the strange word myself; I said it didn't matter, I thought enough of him to marry him whether he was in good health or poor health.

"By the time I actually found out it was too late. We'd already been married eight months. I stick to my bargains; I didn't welsh. I was married to a ghost. That was all right. But then I met Streak, and—I found out my heart was still single. I went to Arnold and I said,

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'Now let me go.' He just smiled. And then I saw I hadn't married any ghost. I'd married a devil.

"You don't know what torture really is, the mental kind. You may have beaten up suspects at times. You don't know what it is to have someone say to you three times a day, 'You wish I was dead, don't you?' Until finally you *do* wish he was dead.

"We didn't want a cheap undercover affair. If that was all we'd wanted it could have been arranged. Streak was born decent, and so was I. He wanted to be my husband and I wanted to be his wife. We were meant for each other, and this ghost was in the way.

"Finally I couldn't stand it any more. I said, 'It would be so easy; why should we go on letting him do this to us?' Streak said, 'Don't talk that way. We don't want to get together by building a bridge over someone's dead body.' Streak's not a murderer. Streak's out of this entirely."

Which didn't prove a thing, except that she loved him.

"They say the female of the species is more deadly than the male. I toyed with the idea. I let it grow on me. Finally it took hold, became decision. Arnold wouldn't give me a chance to change my mind, he kept it at the boiling-point.

"Streak came around in his car, to see if he couldn't win Arnold over by having a man-to-man talk with him alone. I knew he didn't have a chance. I knew what a venomous, diseased mind he was up against. *I* was the one loosened the clamps on that windshield, with a little screwdriver, while both were in the house. But it missed fire.

"I tried in one or two other ways. And then suddenly I came back to my senses. I saw what it was I'd been trying to do all those weeks and months. Take away someone's life. Murder. No matter what a fiend he was, no matter how he'd made us suffer, I saw that was no solution. I'd only have it on my conscience forever after. Dead, he would keep me and Streak apart far more effectively than he had when alive.

"It's ironic, isn't it? When I *wanted* to kill him, nothing I tried would work. Then suddenly, after I'd stopped trying, he goes off—like that!"

I said. "D'you realize what you've just been saying? What you've just admitted? That you actually *did* try to murder him several times without succeeding. And now you want me to believe that this last time, which finally did succeed, it wasn't you, but an accident!"

"Yes, you've got to—because

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it's true! I could have denied that I ever had such an idea altogether. But I don't want to mix part truth and part falsehood. What I've told you is *all* truth from beginning to end, and I want you to believe it. I *did* intend killing him, I *did* try; then I changed my mind, gave up the idea, and an accident took his life.

"All right, now you've heard my side of it. If you want me to go with you, I'm ready to go. Only think well what you're doing, because once the damage is done, there's no undoing it."

"Suppose I go back to town now without doing anything—for the present. Say just overnight. What will you do?"

"Wait here—hoping, praying a little, maybe."

"How do I know that?"

"Where can I go? Running away won't help; it'll just fasten guilt on me. It'll just bring on the ignominy *he* wanted Streak and me to suffer. If we were going to run away now, we could have run away while he was still alive."

She was right about that, of course. "Then wait in this house until you hear from me. Consider yourself in the custody of your own conscience. I'm going back to town now, alone. I want to think this whole thing out—by myself, away from here. I can't think clearly when I'm this close to you. You're very beautiful, you know. I'm a human being, I'm capable of making a mistake, and I don't want to make a mistake. As undeniably as you are beautiful, Iveria is just as undeniably dead."

"It's going to be awful," she said, "to have it hang suspended over my head like that. Will it be very long before I know?"

"As soon as I know myself; sometime tomorrow, maybe. Don't leave the house. If the doorbell rings, and you see me standing out there—you'll know I've come to take you back to face a charge of murder. If the telephone rings—that means you're in the clear, it's over."

Crawley looked in on me at midnight. "What's the matter, haven't you any home?"

I motioned him on his way. "I'm trying to think something out," I said. "I'm going to sit here if it takes all night."

I had the deposition on the table in front of me, and the cigarette case, and the deathbed note. It all balanced so damnably even, his side and hers. Check and doublecheck. Which was the true story, which the false?

The crux of the matter was that final incident. That was where my dilemma lay. If it was murder, Iveria's death de-

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manded reparation. If it was an accident, then it proved him the devil she claimed him to be, for he himself must certainly have known it to be an accident; yet before he died he deliberately phoned me from the hospital and dictated that deathbed message emphasizing that it was murder.

I reviewed the whole case from start to finish. He had walked in to us at Headquarters and left an affidavit in my hands telling me he expected his wife to kill him, in the guise of a trivial accident; telling me he would say "This is it" when it happened. He'd had a trivial accident, and he'd said "This is it" before he died.

I went out to question her and I found her dancing for joy in the presence of the man she loved. She admitted she had tried to kill Iveria several times in the past. She denied she had tried to kill him this last time. But—*she had tried to bribe me* not to pursue the investigation any further. What was the evidence? A bedside bulb loosened a little in its socket so it wouldn't light, a hassock placed where it didn't belong.

She had left me, as if overwhelmed by this gossamer evidence that was really no evidence at all. She didn't come back. I sent the maid after her. I went in there and found the two of them grappling in desperate silence over a gun she had tried to use on herself. As a guilty person who felt that she had been found out? Or an innocent person who despaired of ever satisfactorily clearing herself? I calmed her down, listened to her side of the story, and finally left to think it over alone, telling her I would let her know my decision by coming back for her (guilty) or telephoning (exonerated).

And here I was.

And I'd finally reached one. Even though the scales remained evenly balanced and counterbalanced, to the last hair's-breadth milligram.

Only one grain more had fallen on one side.

In the cold early daylight peering into the office I picked up the phone and asked the sleepy Headquarters operator to get me the number of the Iveria house up there in the country, where she was waiting to know.

I hadn't heard the maid call out from that adjoining room, and I had been fully awake. But *he* claimed he had heard his wife cry out in there, and he was supposedly asleep.

No; he had actually been on his way in there at the time, gun in hand, to take *her* life, when a combination of unexpected little mischances turned the tables on him.

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Factfiction?

Fictionfact?

From the author's letter: "This short piece is a tribute to the late Cornell Woolrich whom I knew as well, perhaps, as anyone during his last years. It is an attempt to capture not only the essence of his work but the essence of the man, in a style which approaches his delicacy. I have tried to get to his basic thematic/psychological concerns, to his agony as an artist too aware of his work, too possessed by his work, too involved with his work, to exist on any level of routine accommodation. I loved Cornell and couldn't stand him in equal measure. To this day my feelings about him remain complex and painful, and in this piece I've tried to pay tribute to him, as one writer to another, in the only way I can and in the pages of the magazine whose editor understood him best—the editor who in the December 1970 issue of EQMM published Cornell Woolrich's last story, 'New York Blues,' in my opinion one of the ten best short stories in the genre . . . The ten sections of my tribute represent THE TEN FACES OF CORNELL WOOLRICH, *the title Ellery Queen gave to the Woolrich book for which, in 1965, EQ wrote a ten-faceted introduction" . . .*

CORNELL

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

I. He is ordered, once again, to meet his public. He stands behind a lectern while a long line of people, curiously orderly, wait to speak to him one by one. "I loved your dancing," the first on line, a young man, says, "but essentially, you know, it was very cheap." He agrees with this. "I hated your dancing," the second, an elderly critic, points out, "but essentially I admit it was important." He agrees with this. "I both loved and hated your dancing," the third, a young woman, says, "because it was cheap and

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important"; and he agrees with this as the line comes upon him, talking far through the night, and passing, one by one, into darkness until he stands blinking in the dawn, rubbing his eyes and looking at the faint trail of litter which his public has left, wondering if it is a code which somehow he could decipher.

2. He imagines himself being strangled and thrown, still alive, into a small mass of struggle at the bottom of a well. In this well he slowly explodes, balloons to extraordinary proportions, and as his body slowly fills the area he perishes in his own breath. This pleases him although he is not sure how he can get at it.

3. In the hotel room he dreams he is watching on television a tape of his own performance. He has become a dancer and is describing great arcs against grayness while the TV host smiles and a chorus of several hundred sing the songs he loves best. His dancing is a success, and squinting at his own image he notices that gaps in his technique appear to have been missed by the studio audience. At the end of his performance the TV host embraces him and brings him out for another bow before the commercial goes on. "Wonderful of you to share with us," the host says, "and we'll have you back real soon"; but although he dreams that he watches the television set unsleeping for many years, he never sees himself again.

4. He receives an award from a national guild of his profession. The award is in the form of a finger cast in silver, pointing at him. No matter which way he turns the award, the finger always points in his direction. He conceals it with small scraps of paper and hides it in his closet.

5. He is given an assignment but all he can think of when the time comes to work is cyanosis: the way in which the facial skin will change color when strangulation ensues. It will go from the white of terror to pink to rose to deeper red to purple and finally to the gentlest blue of the forgotten sea. The colors tantalize him and he is unable to work for thinking of them, but when the time comes for his assignment to be judged he is told that he has done well and is paid accordingly. He then develops a trick of thinking about cyanosis whenever the time comes for work and up to

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a point this functions well, although he understands he cannot rely on mental tricks forever.

6. He dreams that a girl asks him for his autograph but before he can sign she walks away. Turning in his bed he finds that this is only partially a dream and that some girl is talking to him in the sheets. He does not know what she is saying; she seems to have a speech defect and the words are blurred. At a certain point, although he tries to be polite, he throws her out. The girl in the bed and the girl in his dream may have been the same although the question of the speech defect makes this doubtful. She had asked him very distinctly for his autograph.

7. A man in the hotel lobby asks him for an autograph. He balances his cane between his knees while he signs. The man tells him that he grew up watching him dance and for a moment he doubts the dream until he remembers that all of them are liars.

8. The hotel burns to the ground. Saved, he moves to another hotel whose motto is: WE ANNOUNCE FIRES BEFOREHAND.

9. While he sleeps something seems to seize him by the throat and he awakes gasping, but it is only the hand of one of the businessmen with whom he deals. "This can't go on indefinitely," the businessman says mildly, and he answers, "I know that very well; let me straighten it out in the morning"—and so on and so forth until the businessman finally goes away, at which point he returns to sleep until dawn. Awakening, it seems that he should remember something but there is already too much on his mind for such simple games of recollection.

10. He is ordered, once again, to meet his public. He stands behind a lectern while a long line of people, curiously orderly, wait to speak to him one by one. "I loved your dancing," the first on line, a young man, says, "but essentially, you know, it was very cheap." He agrees with this. "I hated your dancing," the second, an elderly critic . . .

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a *NEW* adventure-crime story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Three men in an open boat—lost in the Indian Ocean off the western coast of Australia—no drinking water—only a little food—and three killers of the deep their constant company, circling, circling . . .

Here is a contemporary variation of the "end game" that was invented and named by Wilkie Collins more than a century ago. (Clue: the first American appearance of Wilkie Collins' original version was in the April 1858 issue of "The Atlantic Monthly.")

WYNKEN, BLYNKEN, AND NOD

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Dabney, the little pilot, swam back to consciousness, and the heat struck him like a sledge hammer. He tried to raise his right hand to shield his eyes from the blast-furnace rays of the sun, and the pain that shot along his forearm almost made him pass out again.

"Take it easy, man." Dabney recognized the deep rich voice of Croft, the gigantic black man who was built like a prizefighter but who was a student of oceanography. "Don't try to move around. Maybe this will help."

A handkerchief soaked in water was draped over Dabney's face. The little pilot sucked greedily at the cool liquid and then tried to spit it out. It was salty. At the same time he became aware that the surface on which he was lying was slowly undulating beneath him.

Gingerly Dabney propped himself up on his left elbow, feeling the dull ache in his head and the sharper pain in his right arm. He was thankful that at least one of his passengers was safe—for the present, anyway. But the other?

"Tiedeman?" he asked in a whisper. "What about Tiedeman?"

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"I'm here. Wherever here is." The voice of Tiedeman, the mining engineer, was whining and querulous. " 'The trip from Port Hedland to Broome will be a piece of cake'—that's what you said. I should have known better than to try and ride to such a God-forsaken part of Australia in that broken-down plane of yours. Of all the stupid—"

"I wouldn't carry on so, Tiedeman," Croft said, his voice quietly ominous. "Those tropic storms can come up awful fast. Dabney had no way of knowing about it when he took off."

The trip from Port Hedland, on the west coast of Australia, to Broome, less than 300 miles north, usually held no particular dangers. Dabney, who ran his own small charter plane service "on tuppence and adhesive plaster," had made the flight dozens of times. But this trip he'd made the error of trying to save both time and expensive petrol by flying over the ocean rather than taking the longer but safer route which followed the coastline.

The storm, striking with sudden fury, had shaken the tiny twin-engined plane the way a terrier shakes a rat. Heaven only knew how far off course they'd been blown. The last thing Dabney recalled was looking through the windscreen toward the billowing water below. He'd shouted to the others to break out the survival supplies and the inflatable raft. There'd been a crunching sound as a structural member of the plane was torn loose, and then—

"You struck your head on the instrument panel when we hit," Croft said, "and a piece of glass cut a gash in your forearm. We were lucky, though. I managed to get out the first-aid kit and I bandaged the gash as tight as I could. It really should have stitches, but I think it'll be all right until we can get you to a doctor."

"And the food," murmured Dabney. "What about the food?"

"I got the crate out just before the plane sank," Tiedeman replied. "There's not very much, though, if it's got to be split three ways."

Dabney managed a weak smile. They weren't so bad-off then. With the small crate of tinned meats, fruits, and vegetables there'd be enough for at least a few days if they went on short rations. And the juice in which the fruits and vegetables were packed would furnish a little liquid for their already parched bodies. Now if only the ruddy raft would hold together and not spring a leak.

The raft resembled a misshapen yellow doughnut, if one

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could imagine a doughnut six feet wide and almost fourteen feet long. A nylon rope, held in place by grommets, went around the entire outer circumference. The flooring of the raft was nothing more than a single layer of rubberized canvas through which every movement of the water could be felt.

At one end of the raft hung the small metal tank which had contained the compressed CO_2 with which the outer rim was now filled. The gas, in its rubberized skin, was the only thing which kept them afloat. A single careless movement, a slash of a sharp bit of metal or a puncture by some pointed object, and they would all be floundering in the tepid waters of the Indian Ocean with no land in sight.

The sun settled slowly into the horizon, casting fantastic splashes of color against the sky. "At least we'll be able to use the sun for directions tomorrow," Croft said thoughtfully. "If we row far enough east we ought to hit the coast of Australia somewhere."

"Unless we got blown farther than we thought," Tiedeman growled. "For all we know we could be nearer to Indonesia than Australia."

"I doubt that," Croft said. "The storm didn't last long enough to blow us that far. Besides, the wind was coming from almost due east. If anything we've just been blown a few miles farther out to sea. We'll break out the oars and start rowing at sunup."

"Well, what about some food, then?" Tiedeman asked. "When's supper?"

"Supper's first thing in the morning," Croft snapped. "We've only got a little food, Tiedeman, and it may have to last us a long time."

"But I'm hungry. Besides, who put you in charge of that crate?"

"There's only one way you can get to this crate of food," Croft said in a flat voice, "and that's to come down to this end of the raft and take it away from me."

Tiedeman grumbled but made no move to approach the heavily muscled Croft. Dabney smiled. They were going to make it, he was sure of that. He didn't trust Tiedeman as far as he could throw Buckingham Palace, but with Croft taking charge, everything was going to be fine. Just fine.

It was three hours before dawn when the sharks came.

Overnight the ocean had become glassy smooth as if to atone for the storm of the previous day. While the sun was burning off the early morning haze, Croft saw the first ripples:

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a dorsal fin, gray-brown and tipped with white, cut the water about 20 yards away like some demoniac broadsword; then off to the right a second fin broke the surface, and with a slight splash a third appeared behind the second.

"We've got company," Croft said to Tiedeman, nodding toward the largest of the fins.

"Sharks!" Tiedeman's voice rasped in his throat, and Croft caught the edge of panic in it. "Do you think they—I mean, this raft isn't very strong."

Croft shook his head. "I doubt they'll attack. The bottom of the raft looks like just a lump in the water to them. Not very appetizing."

"Sharks are sharks," Tiedeman said, "and they eat people. But maybe they haven't spotted us. Maybe they'll go away."

"Oh, they've seen us, all right. Look, they're circling the raft."

Around and around moved the fins in a counterclockwise direction, making no attempt to come nearer.

"You'd better wake Dabney and tell him about the sharks," Croft said. "I don't think we're in any immediate danger, but I don't want anybody dragging an arm or a leg in the water or throwing anything over the side that might attract them."

Tiedeman shook Dabney awake. The pilot's arm was thickly swollen and of a fiery red color from hand to elbow. He groaned with pain and gritted his teeth as he shifted his weight.

Without a word Tiedeman pointed toward the nearest of the gliding fins.

Dabney nodded. "I expected the ruddy blighters would 'ang about when I seen 'em come by last night."

"Last night? But how—"

"The waters of this 'ere ocean ofttimes glows when there's somethin' movin' down there," said Dabney. "Mr. Croft probably has some explanation for it, but all I know is, it happens." The pilot's eyes seemed to glitter brightly, and Tiedeman didn't like the way the man was staring at him. He pressed his palm to Dabney's brow. It was dry and burning with fever.

"I couldn't sleep last night, with me arm and all, so I was lookin' over the side. Saw a school of little fishies about ten feet down. The three sharks was cuttin' through them time after time, gettin' a mouthful of fish dinner with every pass. I must 'ave watched 'em for an hour or so before I dozed off again."

Dabney collapsed into the bottom of the raft, breathing heavily. "Wynken," he said, gasping, "Blynken, and Nod."

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"What are you talking about, Dabney? I can't understand you."

"Wynken, Blynken, and Nod," the pilot repeated. "That's the names I gave to the sharks. Oh, don't laugh at me. It's from an old nursery rhyme me poor dear Mum used to tell me."

"Croft!" Tiedeman called. "Come and have a look at Dabney. I think he's off his head."

The huge black man slid over beside Dabney, who was still mumbling in a soft voice:

" 'We have come to fish
for the herring fish
That live in this beautiful sea;
Nets of silver and gold
have we!'
Said Wynken,
Blynken, and Nod."

"Look at the way his flesh is swollen around that bandage you put on him," Tiedeman said. "Don't you think you'd better loosen it?"

"I don't dare," Croft replied. "If that cut of his begins bleeding again, we might never get it stopped. We'll try keeping his clothes soaked in sea water. That may bring down the fever. Use his hat to dip with, but don't make too much commotion. We don't want to attract those sharks any nearer than they are right now."

The simple remedy seemed to work, at least temporarily. Within half an hour Dabney, soaking wet, was complaining of hunger in a faint but coherent voice. Croft reached into the food crate and brought out three cans.

"Tomatoes, peaches, and"—he chuckled softly—"and cocktail sausages." Croft turned to the pilot, smiling. "What were you going to do, Dabney?" he asked. "Have a little party when your plane went down?"

"You can give me the bloody bangers," said Dabney, rolling over painfully and stretching out his left hand. "You and Tiedeman take the tomatoes and peaches."

Tiedeman reached greedily for the can of peaches, but Croft jerked it away from him. "None of that," he said. "The fruits and vegetables will have more juice in them than the meat, and we'll be needing all the liquids we can get. It'll be share and share alike."

He gave a sudden grunt of amazement and held up one of the cans, looking at it thoughtfully. "I don't suppose you thought about how we were going to open these cans, Dabney?"

"No, I—Coo! That's a rum go now, ain't it? It never occurred to me to bring somethin' to—"

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Tiedeman reached into a pocket and brought out a small red object. "Swiss army knife," he explained. "It's got everything in it you'd want. Blade, scissors, awl, can opener—"

"Saved again," Dabney murmured. "Just let Tiedeman find the right gadget, and Bob's-your-uncle."

Croft handed Tiedeman the three cans, and the engineer began prying at the top of one of them. "Chop everything up fine and mix it all together," Croft ordered. "We'll split it three ways. And when you're finished don't throw the empty cans overboard. We may need them to catch rain in—if it rains."

When they had finished eating, Croft assembled the collapsible aluminum oars attached to the raft and inserted them through the oarlocks. Slowly he began rowing away from the rising sun. "Keep an eye on those sharks," he told Tiedeman. "Let me know if any break the circle. The flashing of the oars might attract them."

Tiedeman observed the sharks for several minutes. "They aren't coming any closer, but they aren't going away, either."

"Me, I'm gettin' used to havin' 'em around," Dabney said. "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod—they make a bloke feel he's got company out here."

"How do you tell them apart?" Croft asked, trying to hide his concern for the pilot's sanity.

"It ain't hard. Two of them fins is about the same size, right? Well, them's Wynken and Blynken. Blynken's got a notch cut out of the tip of his fin, so he must've been in a fight of some kind. And Nod's fin is a good deal bigger than the other two."

Again Tiedeman considered the fins. "You know, Dabney's right," he finally said to Croft. "You can tell them apart." He pointed astern. "That would be Nod—the one with the biggest fin, and—Croft! It's heading for the raft!"

Croft saw the flat side of the dorsal fin become a thin line protruding above the surface as the shark headed directly toward them. With a single swift movement he shifted the oars inboard. He was about to shout a warning to leap clear of the raft when the fin angled a few degrees to one side.

The two men watched as the huge fish passed by, almost within touching distance. The eyes in its large round head were cold and deadly, and the enormous pectoral fins, tipped with white, spread like wings from its body. At the side of the head, just behind the gill slits, a remora had fastened its sucker to the shark's skin, and several

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striped pilotfish swam just ahead of the cruelly grinning mouth. The monster tail, a wicked scythe of bone and cartilage, swept slowly from side to side, propelling the streamlined, twelve-foot body swiftly through the water. It passed the raft, made a wide turn, and resumed its place, circling again.

"I—I've never seen any fish that big," Tiedeman whispered.

"It's a whitetip," Croft said, "and one of the bigger ones. *Carcharhinus longimanus* is the Latin name—the one Jacques Cousteau calls 'Lord of the Long Arms' because of those big pectoral fins."

"If it goes for the raft we won't have a chance."

"It was probably just on a tour of inspection. But we're lucky there are a lot of smaller fish in these waters. I doubt that the sharks will attack us unless they get hungry—or unless they're provoked."

"Provoked?"

"Yeah. Irregular splashing will usually bring them running—the sharks think it's a wounded fish. You'll notice I've been pulling on the oars with a slow steady stroke. I'd suggest you do the same when it's your turn to row. And keep your arms and legs out of the water. They'd look like small fish following us—just the thing for a quick snack."

"Don't worry," Tiedeman said, his face pale. "I want to keep just as far from those things as I can. Anything else I should know?"

"Well, blood in the water will attract them from a long way off. So be careful with that knife of yours and don't—"

"Wynken, Blynken, and Nod, one night, sailed off—sailed off—" Dabney suddenly sat bolt upright in the rear of the raft, staring vacantly out to sea. His mumbling trailed away as he turned toward Croft and Tiedeman, an idiot's grin on his face.

"He's delirious again," Croft said as the pilot, his strength exhausted, dropped into the bottom of the raft. "I wish I knew what to do for him. That arm looks worse every hour."

"Croft?" Tiedeman's voice became low. "About Dabney. You know, don't you, that there are only six cans of food left."

"So? What's that got to do with Dabney?"

"We might be out here for days, even for weeks. It's impossible for us to do any fishing with those sharks around, and I don't see any sign of rain clouds."

"Oh, I think we'll come out of this all right. There'll be planes looking for us. In fact, they're probably in the air right now. After all, Dabney filed a

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flight plan to Broome, and when we didn't show up yesterday they'd know something was wrong."

"But they won't know where to look. That storm could have blown us anywhere."

"What's all this got to do with Dabney?"

"He can't take his turn at the oars, can he? He's too helpless to do anything. Besides, that arm of his looks gangrenous already. He'll be certain to die in a day or two, no matter what we do. So I just thought we might—"

"What are you suggesting, Tiedeman?" Croft demanded. "Throw him to the sharks or just let him starve to death? Or maybe you'd like to practise a little discreet cannibalism. Just what, exactly, did you have in mind?"

"Dammit, I just thought the wisest thing would be to—"

"To murder him, Tiedeman? That's what you're talking about, isn't it? Well, I'm not having any. Dabney will get his regular share of the rations as long as they hold out. After that we'll try to figure out some other way of getting food and water."

"And who put you in charge, black boy?" Tiedeman snarled. "What gives you the right to make all the decisions around here?"

Croft bowed his head and then raised it slowly. "I should kill you for what you just said," he murmured slowly, "but that would make me as bad as you. And as for my right to be in charge, it's a simple matter of physical strength. I could break you in two any time I felt like it. And if you try anything with Dabney I might do just that. Now take the oars. I need some rest."

Late that afternoon the plane came over. Tiedeman was the first to hear the drone of the motors and he shouted to Croft, who was attending to Dabney.

"Wave something!" Croft yelled. "Use your shirt. Try to attract their attention."

The small plane was flying about a hundred yards above the water, perhaps a half mile away. The two men shouted hoarsely and waved scraps of cloth. The sound of the plane's motors became louder and louder. Then they began to fade away as, without changing speed or direction, it headed toward the distant horizon.

Tiedeman, tired by his efforts, slumped into the bottom of the raft. "They didn't see us," he croaked. "They didn't see us. I—I've got to have water, Croft." He looked longingly into the sea.

"Don't try it, Tiedeman," Croft warned. "You know what salt water can do to you."

"How about opening a can?" asked the engineer. "Just one."

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"Not until tomorrow. And if we cut down to two cans of food for the three of us we can make them last an extra day. I think we ought to try it."

The food allowance cut by one-third! Tiedeman looked hatefully at the unconscious form of Dabney.

The sun was still above the horizon when Croft, exhausted by the rowing and the lack of food and water, turned the oars over to Tiedeman and moved to the front of the raft. Curling his huge body into a ball he fell asleep almost immediately.

Less than an hour later he was awakened by a shouting. He opened his eyes, straightened his aching body, and looked about. Tiedeman had apparently fallen asleep over the oars. That was all right. The sun had nearly set and it would be impossible to find directions in the dark. The shout must have come from Dabney.

But Dabney was not in the raft!

Croft heard a thrashing in the water off to his left. He turned. The little pilot was in the water about 50 feet away, shouting gibberish and flailing his arms to keep his head above the surface. Croft also saw that the three sharks had broken their ring around the raft and had formed a smaller circle around Dabney.

Frantically Croft looked for a piece of rope or something to throw to the man in the water. Finding nothing, he pushed Tiedeman to one side and grasped the oars. Even as he did this, Blynken's notched fin disappeared from view. There was a sudden shrill scream from Dabney as the shark struck him somewhere below the surface. The last thing Croft saw was the man's arms, upraised as if pleading for mercy, before he was savagely yanked down into the sea.

The sharks seemed to go mad. They raced through the water like silver torpedoes, biting at the thing that had once been Dabney, as well as at each other. Once Croft felt the bump of a huge body striking the raft from underneath, and he rowed hard to move away from the area where the sharks were finishing their grisly meal. Then, overcome by shock, hunger, and thirst, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed loudly.

The following morning Croft and Tiedeman shared a can of tomatoes. Croft ate first, emptying the can of half its contents, and then handed the rest to Tiedeman, who sucked greedily at the juicy redness. All too soon they were finished, and there was nothing to do for the rest of the day except to keep rowing and watching the incessant circling of the sharks.

"Croft," Tiedeman moaned,

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"now that Dabney's gone, couldn't we open another can? There'll be more for each of us now."

"I'll think about it," Croft replied. "Maybe tonight." He looked steadily at his companion. "What happened to Dabney, Tiedeman?" he asked suddenly.

"I dunno. I was asleep, same as you. In fact, it wasn't until you shoved me that I woke up. I'd imagine, though, that the fever finally got to him and he started wriggling around. Being out of his head he fell out of the raft—the sides aren't very high. By the time he realized where he was—in the water—it was too late."

"Or maybe he had some help getting into the water," Croft said grimly. "I haven't forgotten the way you were talking yesterday."

"Hey, wait a minute. Do you think I'd—"

"I think you'd do anything to get another can of that food back there." Croft pointed to the crate in the rear of the raft. "And there was something about Dabney—just before he went under. Something odd. I wish I could remember what it was."

"Look, maybe I was a little crazy myself yesterday. But I wouldn't push anybody to those sharks. What do you think I am, Croft?"

"What I think you are and what I can prove are two different things," was the reply. "But okay, it could have happened by accident, I suppose. Just don't try seeing that I have an 'accident,' too, or I won't be the one who ends up in the water."

"Croft, I swear I never—"

"Save your breath. It's your turn to row."

The morning passed slowly, the two men changing off at the oars at what they judged were hourly intervals. As the sun reached its zenith Croft turned the oars over to Tiedeman and went to the rear of the raft to rest.

He tried to sleep, but the hot sun, reflecting from the water, sent flashes of light even through his closed eyelids. He kept thinking of Dabney, out there in the water, and of that awful moment when he disappeared from view. There was something wrong somewhere, but Croft couldn't put his finger on it. He shuddered, thinking of a wounded whale he'd once seen attacked by sharks in the Pacific. The sharks would streak in with open jaws and bite down on the living flesh. Then they'd jerk their tails wildly, whipping their great bodies until they'd ripped off a piece of meat the size of a basketball.

He peered over the side of

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the raft, trying to get his mind off the morbid memory of Dabney's death. One of the striped pilotfish had apparently abandoned its shark and adopted the raft. Only a little thicker than Croft's thumb, the pilotfish darted toward the stern of the raft and then away again. It continued the darting for several minutes.

Croft frowned. Odd. Usually such fish kept a regular distance from a shark or whatever they elected to accompany. But this fish looked as if it were being attracted by something. It couldn't be the oars; they were too far away. Then what—

Croft looked over the side of the raft. There it was. Something caught in the rope that ran around the raft's outer edge. A white streamer of a thing that fluttered and waved in the water. He pulled at it and brought it aboard.

He stared at the white thing draped across his hands for several seconds before the full significance of what he was holding came to him.

A mighty rage welled up in the black man, banishing all the weakness and discomfort he had experienced in the past few days. "Tiedeman!" he yelled, his voice roaring across the water. "You killed him, Tiedeman. You killed Dabney!"

Tiedeman looked up, startled. Pulling an oar free of the rowlock he held it in front of him protectively. "What are you talking about?" he asked. "It was an accident."

"It's no good," Croft said, shaking his head. "You see, I remember what was different about Dabney's appearance just as the sharks got him. He raised both arms just as he was dragged under."

"So?"

"So there was no bandage on his right arm. It was all swollen, but there was no bandage on it!"

"What does that prove? Maybe the knot came untied, or maybe it was worn through and unwound in the water."

Croft held up the white cloth in his hand. "Here's the bandage. Apparently it got caught on the rope around the raft when Dabney went over. When you pushed him."

"Look, the bandage came untied and got hooked on the rope. So what?"

"The knot's still in the bandage. See." He held the strip of cloth closer. "And the ends here—they aren't worn through. They were cut. And you're the only one in the raft with a knife."

Croft threw the bandage to the bottom of the raft and stared with open hatred at Tiedeman. "It wasn't enough

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just to push Dabney into the water, was it?" he snarled. "You had to cut off the bandage and start the wound bleeding again. That would be sure to attract the sharks, just the way I told you it would. And all for an extra can or two of food. Tiedeman, I think it's time you got a closer look yourself at Wynken, Blynken, and Nod."

Croft stood up, towering over the seated Tiedeman. He stretched out his arms. At that moment, swift as a striking snake, Tiedeman brought up the aluminum oar. It caught Croft full in the chest. The huge man stumbled backward. The edge of the raft caught his legs, and, with arms outstretched, he fell back into the water. Wynken was the first shark to leave the circle.

In the water Croft looked up at the man looming over him. Quickly he made a surface dive under the raft. Tiedeman darted glances from side to side. Croft could come up anywhere. Tiedeman had to be ready. Jamming his hand into his pocket he pulled out the Swiss army knife, and his fingers clawed at the blades. The awl was the first to pop into view.

Something bumped at the front of the raft. Tiedeman scrambled forward just as a dark hand reached over the raft's rounded side. "Tiedeman!" Croft yelled. "The sharks! They're coming. Help me!"

"I'll help you, all right." Raising the knife in his clenched fist, Tiedeman brought down the sharp point of the awl. The slender shaft of metal pierced through skin and flesh as if through butter.

The awl went completely through Croft's hand. But it did not stop there. Half an inch of it punched a neat hole in the rubberized skin of the raft. As Croft's hand slid away, still transfixed by the knife, Tiedeman heard the hissing of escaping gas and quickly pressed a finger over the hole. The hissing stopped.

Something larger and stronger than Croft struck the underside of the raft and almost upended it. Desperately Tiedeman pressed harder against the hole. Ten feet away Croft made a last effort to reach safety. One arm was raised to begin swimming.

And then a gigantic shadow appeared below the swimming man. Croft did not scream; he simply vanished. A red stain billowed out through the water as the shadowy things below fed once more.

Finally it was over. The sharks resumed their inexorable circling, and Tiedeman con-

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tinued to plug the leak in the raft with his finger. Once he took his finger away for a fraction of a second and the gas rushed out, the raft becoming perceptibly softer.

As the afternoon wore on, Tiedeman looked longingly at the crate of food at the other end of the raft. There was a patch kit back there somewhere, too. He calculated distances. How long would it take for him to scrabble his way to the rear of the raft, get the patch kit, and bring it forward? Thirty seconds? In that time the raft would have exhausted its precious supply of gas and be completely deflated.

The food was also denied to him. Even if he had the time to reach a can, he now had no way of opening it. So he would starve—or perhaps become too weak from thirst. Even a short nap would be his last.

For the small part of his remaining life he would be condemned to sit in the blazing sun, without food or water, pressing his index finger tightly over the tiny hole.

And, still circling the raft, Wynken, Blynken, and Nod waited.

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continuing the series of

NEW police procedurals by

LAWRENCE TREAT

The Moonlight Bandit, Beethoven records, Joey's friend, a stamp album, Thursday-night bowling, a paper dick (do you know what a paper dick is?), an escaped convict, a telephone clue—Inspector Mitch Taylor put them all together and came up with—what? A policeman's lot . . .

B AS IN BANDIT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

The papers called him "The Moonlight Bandit" on account he had a bunch of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata records and whenever he pulled a job he played the thing and then left a record behind. Which didn't make sense to Inspector Mitch Taylor, Homicide, because when you're stripping a joint you want to be able to listen if anybody's coming and then get out fast.

Still, it was no skin off Mitch's back. The way things were, while the Homicide Squad had jurisdiction over all crimes against the person, the Moonlight Bandit stayed away from rough stuff as much as he could. While he had to shove somebody out of his way once in a while, his assaults were small potatoes that the local precincts took care of.

Mitch was glad to leave it at that. Whoever this guy was, he was pulling off a couple of jobs a week, and getting good press notices, too. It got to where he was making the front page regular, and there was this columnist who had a bunch of jokes about the way good classical music was lulling the department to sleep and all you needed to get away with robberies was to know a little Beethoven. Stuff like that.

Naturally, with all that publicity, the guy was bound to get caught. The way it happened was, somebody heard this record being played in an

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empty house, so they called the police. What with the music going, he didn't even hear the cops, and they just walked in and nabbed him.

The guy, his name was Clyde Eckert, had spent most of his life behind bars, and he admitted to the 18 other "Moonlight" burglaries. That wrapped up the Moonlight Bandit for a while and Mitch didn't worry about him any more until Joey brought up the subject.

Mitch was pretty proud of this kid of his. Maybe Joey wasn't getting the best marks in his class, but they hadn't found a subject yet that they could fail him in. So Joey was okay, except when he hauled off on his sister. That wasn't too often, and Joey had plenty of friends and he could catch a ball with the rest of them, and while he couldn't run too fast, what did he want to run away from, anyhow?

Then Joey came home one night and said his friend Ronny's real mother was dead and now he had a stepmother and Joey wanted to know what that was. Anyhow, Ronny's house was one of the ones that had been robbed by this Moonlight guy. According to Joey, he'd knocked Ronny down and taken his stamp collection along with a lot of other valuable stuff. And what's more, Ronny hadn't gotten his stamp collection back, which was worth money. Plenty.

Mitch said that was too bad, he was sorry to hear about it. And Joey looked up with those big solemn eyes of his and said, "But, Daddy, he's my *friend.*"

That made things a little different, so Mitch explained that this wasn't his case, he wasn't the whole police department, there were some things he had nothing to do with. And Joey, with that same look in his eyes, said, "But you told me once that any time anybody got hurt by somebody else, you did something about it. Not the others. *You* did."

"Yeah," Mitch said, wishing he kept his mouth shut more often, "but I got a lot of other stuff to take care of. I only handle cases when they're brought to me."

"I'm bringing it to you," Joey said. "And Ronny's my *friend.* I promised him."

"Sure," Mitch said. "I'll look into it." And he picked up the paper and turned to the sports section where it showed a picture of a guy trying to steal second. "You see this?" Mitch said. "You know what's wrong? The guy has his body leaning over to the same side where the ball's coming. You always want to lean away from the ball—it

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makes the tag harder."

Joey nodded, and Mitch figured he'd tell Joey he really wanted to look into his burglary business, only there were a lot of other things piling up right now. Except the next night Joey came around with a tow-headed kid who stared at Mitch like he thought Mitch had just hit a home run with the bases full in the world series. And the kid had a bruise on his cheek that had just missed his eye.

Joey introduced him. "Daddy, this is my friend Ronny Lasker. He's the one got robbed and knocked down."

Mitch shook his had, big-brother-like, and said, "He gave you that sock on the cheek, huh?"

Ronny shook his head. "No, sir. The thief hit me here." He patted his backside. "The thing on my face, I fell while Joey was chasing me."

"What was he chasing you for?"

"Because I was chasing him."

Mitch didn't exactly follow the logic of it, but he made like he understood. Then Ronny said, "Joey said you'd get my stamp album back."

Mitch tried to climb out of it, but he knew he was elected. Ronny'd lost his album, Joey'd promised to get it back for him, and so Mitch was hooked. He asked a few questions, and the way Ronny told it, it seemed his folks went bowling every Thursday night and always left the phone number where Ronny could get hold of them, just in case. This particular Thursday, Ronny woke up some time after they'd left, he didn't know exactly when, and he heard a funny sound. He got up, went downstairs, bumped into somebody and fell down.

He didn't really see this guy because it was so dark, but he heard music. After it stopped, Ronny went over to the phone and called the number of the bowling alley and asked for his folks. The guy told him they weren't there and to stop bothering him. Then Ronny just lay down on the couch and cried, and he must have cried himself to sleep because when his folks got back they found him there. And found out somebody'd stolen everything valuable, including Ronny's stamp album.

Mitch didn't ask too many questions, because after all this was only a kid and kids get mixed up and kind of invent stuff. You got to be careful not to put ideas in their heads, or else they'll say what they think you want to hear.

Mitch had enough dope for a starter, but the next day he

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went down to the Fourth, the precinct where the Lasker burglary had taken place, and hunted up Charlie Tracy. On account Charlie would naturally wonder why Mitch was messing in on this when he could just as well stay on his side of the fence, Mitch gave an explanation.

"This Lasker, the one that this Moonlight guy burgled," Mitch said, "he's my brother-in-law. And you know how you can get hung up when your own family's involved."

Charlie understood. "My wife's cousin got mugged once," he said, "and he figured that all he had to do was go see Charlie Tracy. That's the public for you, huh?"

"So I got to do something," Mitch said. "For instance, there was some kind of a stamp collection disappeared, wasn't there?"

"I'll get the B-2 sheet," Charlie said, referring to the form on which the stolen property was listed. "Anything else you want?"

"Might as well show me the works," Mitch said in a resigned voice.

Charlie went over to the files and got the stuff, and Mitch looked it over. Radio, jewelry, stamps. Stamp collection valued at $1,000.

"Eckert say anything about the stamps?" Mitch asked.

Charlie didn't even bat an eye. "You know how it is," he said.

Mitch knew all right. Eckert hadn't committed any 18 burglaries. He'd done one or two, maybe. He knew about the Moonlight Bandit and wanted to go through the same swinging door because it was the kind of thing you could get away with. So he gave it a try, and ended upstairs in the squadroom of the Fourth.

The way a cop who knew the ropes worked it was, when you caught a crook like this Eckert and had him cold, Moonlight record and all, you asked him about a bunch of other jobs. If he knew what was good for him he confessed to anything you mentioned. So you crossed off a bunch of your back cases, and your batting average went way up. Then, on account this Eckert had helped out, you made sure the case against him wasn't *too* good and that there were a couple of pieces of evidence you sort of forgot about. As a result, the D.A. didn't have an airtight case, so he made a deal and let Eckert plead guilty to a misdemeanor, and everybody was happy. Eckert would get off with a light sentence, the record would look good, the courts wouldn't get even more

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clogged up, and the citizens would say what a fine police department they had. Until the next time, anyhow.

So Mitch understood. This kind of business, where all you did was make a few entries on the record, it made Tracy what they called a paper dick, and everybody went along with it. But Mitch, who didn't want to upset the apple cart but still wanted to get hold of those stamps of Ronny's, had kind of a problem.

"Mind if I take the whole report?" Mitch said. "Any time I run into anything, I'll let you know."

Charlie didn't go for that. "Don't do me no favors," he said.

"I got to get along with the family," Mitch said by way of explanation, but he could tell Charlie wasn't exactly convinced. Still, what could Charlie do about it? He wasn't going to go out and try to prove a Homicide man was a liar, so he went back and got copies of the Eckert file and handed them to Mitch.

Mitch left the precinct with his feet going backwards. First off, he wondered why a nine-year-old would have a stamp collection worth a thousand bucks, and next thing, he still couldn't figure out why Beethoven came into the picture. Which made Lasker and the stamp album as the first order of business, same as they'd been yesterday.

This Lasker, he was a big guy with a small head, and his job was a sort of foreman in a wholesale lumber place. It seemed he checked out stuff and hunted up materials when they were needed. There were trucks coming up alongside the loading platform inside a big shed, and Lasker ticked off what was sent out and wrote it down on a piece of paper and then handed it to the driver. And if Lasker wasn't stealing the outfit deaf, dumb, and blind, then Mitch was an angel with wings.

After Mitch had introduced himself and showed his potsy, Lasker said, "Let's you and me go in my office where we can talk private."

The office was a nine-by-six cubbyhole with a phone and a desk, and it was partitioned off in one corner of the warehouse. Lasker could look through a picture window and see who was stealing what. He leaned back against the edge of his desk and waited for Mitch to start things going.

"A couple of things about this burglary in your house," Mitch said for openers. "Those stamps—they were pretty valuable, huh?"

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"I put the value down as well as I could," Lasker said, kind of cagey. "Of course, my memory could be off a little."

"Could be way off," Mitch said.

Lasker frowned. "What are you getting at?"

"Just this," Mitch said. "You expect me to swallow that you gave your kid a thousand dollars' worth of stamps and let him stick them in an album he'd maybe take to school and leave on his desk or something?"

Lasker rubbed his forearm, which was pretty solid. "What do you want?" he asked. "I'll play ball, mister. You just call the shots."

"Ronny and my kid, they're friends," Mitch said. "I told Ronny I'd get his album back. Where is it?"

"Stolen," Lasker said. "And that's on the level."

Mitch looked out the window and watched a truck driver lug a couple of four-by-eight panels of plywood across the warehouse and set them in a special place on the truck, and then drape a tarpaulin over them so they were more or less hid. And what the payoff to Lasker was going to be, Mitch didn't know. But the question was whether Lasker was satisfied with the racket he was running here, or whether he was reaching out for other stuff. Like second-story burglar work.

Mitch, after not making up his mind, came back to Lasker. "I figure you threw the album out in the garbage pail," Mitch said, "and then put in a claim for a thousand. You got insurance, haven't you—a comprehensive that would cover stamps?"

"Sure. What about it?"

"And you and the Mrs. didn't go bowling the night of the burglary," Mitch stated, telling himself that Lasker had made up the whole burglary story. To make it look real he'd knocked down his own kid, making sure the kid couldn't see him in the dark and wasn't really hurt. And while Mitch didn't expect Lasker to come right out and confess, Mitch threw it at him anyhow.

It took Lasker a couple of seconds to make up his mind how he was going to field Mitch's grounder. Then Lasker said, "We went bowling, but to a different place. At Finney's, where we go regular, I had a little run-in with the manager the week before and he told me not to come back, he didn't want to see me around. So we went somewhere else."

"Where?" Mitch asked.

"The Ideal Alleys. It's a big place, they wouldn't know me there, but you call Finney's and

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talk to the manager and he'll say just like what I told you. His name's Russo and we don't get along."

"I'll do just that," Mitch said.

He picked up the phone and holding it close to his mouth and talking low so Lasker couldn't catch any of the words, he got hold of Russo and put his questions. It looked like Lasker had been straight on that much, anyhow.

"Okay," Mitch said, after he'd finished the call. "Now tell me how you figured you'd get away with a claim for a thousand dollars' worth of stamps you never had."

"I was ready to settle with the insurance people," Lasker said. "You ask for a thousand and you settle for maybe half, if you give the adjuster his cut. You know how it is."

The way Mitch looked at him, Lasker could tell he wasn't getting anywheres, so he tried a new tack. "Mister," Lasker said, "what are you trying to squeeze me for? I never did anything to you, did I?"

"Just come clean," Mitch said. "You'll end up better that way."

Lasker mulled over that one before he spoke. "You look like a right guy," he said, "so here it is: I bought this album for Ronny, it was a special for a buck fifty and the place where I bought it, MacFarlane's—well, I had a feeling about him. I made him a proposition. I said I'd buy ten bucks' worth of stamps if he'd give me a receipt saying I'd bought a hundred dollars' worth. He jumped at it. Only I never went through with it, I didn't commit any crime. Maybe I was going to, but I didn't, and I'm leveling with you all the way."

It was around then, and for no particular reason, that Mitch got a brainstorm.

"You said you go bowling every Thursday," he said. "Who knows about it?"

"I couldn't say. Some friends of mine. I guess Russo knew it, too."

"Yeah," Mitch said. Then, feeding it slow and leading Lasker on, Mitch strung out his idea. "Anybody phone you sometime before the burglary and try to find out when you were home? A door-to-door canvasser, for instance? Any phone calls that you answered, and then whoever it was hung up?"

Lasker snapped his fingers. "There was a dame," he said. "This insurance gal, she had what you call a wonderful telephone voice, and she said she had a proposition that was too good to tell me over the phone and when could she

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come over to see me, so I told her any evening except Thursday."

"Who was she?" Mitch asked. "What insurance company?"

"She didn't say."

"No name?"

"Charlotte something. The last name was hard to get."

"Did she ever come around?"

"No."

"Thanks," Mitch said. "I guess that does it."

He went out, telling himself he ought to follow up on this Charlotte business. If it was straight, then some of the other Moonlight victims would give him the same story as Lasker.

Back in the car, Mitch checked with the dispatcher. Nothing much had happened, so Mitch stopped off at the nearest phone, gave his badge number so he'd get his dime back, and called the first three names on Tracy's robbery list. They'd all heard from this female, they weren't sure of her name except it was Charlotte, and she wanted to know when they'd be home. None of them had ever heard from her again.

Mitch had that part of it ironed out. This bandit, and his name wasn't Eckert, worked with a dame that had a good phone voice. She found out when people would be out for the evening, and then she and this Moonlight guy broke in. Maybe she just liked Beethoven or maybe he did, but she was probably outside watching while he went through the house. If anybody turned up she could let him know. So the thing was, who was she?

What with his regular assignments, that was all Mitch could manage that day. What he'd dug up so far, he kept to himself. He was pretty sure Charlie Tracy wouldn't exactly thank him for turning up the Lasker information, on account it would only make for more work. Still, what Mitch was interested in was getting Ronny's album. Chances were, Mitch could drop over to the MacFarlane shop and buy a duplicate and give it to Ronny. A buck and a half would wrap up the whole business and leave Ronny and Joey a pair of happy kids.

The next morning, at the Homicide Squad briefing, there was nothing to get excited about. Pretty much the usual stuff, as far as Mitch was concerned. A few flyers out. Some stolen car numbers to memorize. Somebody named Oscar Reed was wanted for a post-office holdup, two men who looked like brothers had shot up a gas station and got eighty-three bucks, a convict

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named Sherbourne had escaped from the penitentiary and was thought to be hiding out here in the city, a bank robber named Petrolini had been seen in a downtown bar, and some con man had managed to fleece a jewelry store out of a ten-grand diamond ring. Three dames had been mugged and one of the muggers was thought to be Harry Lake, a molester who liked older women wearing glasses.

Mitch went out. He had Car Number Four, same as usual, and he was supposed to drive up to the hospital to question the gas-station attendant who'd been wounded in that stickup. On the way the dispatcher told him there'd been a hit-and-run and that the victim was being taken to the hospital and Mitch should question him.

Mitch saw the gas-station attendant and didn't learn much, and then he hung around and waited for the hit-and-run victim. When Mitch finally saw him, the guy gave him a general description of the car, and not much more.

By then it was lunchtime, but seeing as how the hospital was in the same neighborhood as the MacFarlane address, Mitch went there first.

MacFarlane had heavy black eyebrows and hair that came low on his forehead, and he knew right off that Mitch was a cop, just like Mitch knew right off that MacFarlane was an ex-con. And even if Mitch hadn't known, the store yelled out that it was some kind of a blind, for numbers or nags or drugs—you couldn't tell. There were some groceries, just bread and milk and some canned stuff, and some magazines and paperbacks on one shelf, and then a glass case with some stamps. But it wasn't a grocery or a bookstore or a stamp shop, either.

From some kind of music you could hear from inside, Mitch figured that MacFarlane lived in the back or else did his real business in there. Either way, MacFarlane was liable to clam up on just about everything unless Mitch came right out with what he was after. So he identified himself and said, "Let's not kid around. A guy by the name of Lasker bought some stamps here for his kid. He bought an album for a buck fifty. I got a kid wants the same thing, and that's why I'm here. No other reason. So—got it?"

"We had a few of them," MacFarlane said, careful-like. "I'll see if I got any more. But if I can't dig one up, you can get the same thing all over town."

"I want the exact thing," Mitch said. "Every stamp the

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same. Nothing different."

"Can't do that," MacFarlane said. "The way the stamp companies make them up, they throw in about fifty stamps they found in a trash basket, and they sell them to kids. Kids don't want the same as anybody else. They want to trade, so all the stamps got to be different."

"Well," Mitch said, "looks like there's nothing I can do about it." And he left the place.

He should have dropped it there. Anything else was going to heat up the case and make Charlie Tracy look bad. And the idea of Mitch Taylor, Homicide, working on his own time, for personal reasons—if that got around, his name would be mud. So he should have dropped the case, only he couldn't. Because this was getting to be more than chasing down Ronny's stamp album, worth a buck fifty. Mitch was on to something and he thought he knew the answers.

He was a lot surer when he called the Lasker house and Mrs. Lasker answered in a good telephone voice. And her words came easy, like she could string anybody along if she felt like it.

"Your name Charlotte?" he asked. She hung up, either because he was getting too personal or because she was afraid he was on to her.

In his own mind Mitch had everything pretty well sewed up. Lasker was the Moonlight Bandit, and his Mrs. called people up and said she was Charlotte and found out when they were going to be away from home. She probably acted as a lookout, while he committed the actual burglaries. Chances were he didn't turn on the Moonlight record until he was ready to leave, which covered any noise he happened to make while leaving and signaled her he was on his way out. To fool the police and look innocent, Lasker had robbed his own house when everybody thought he was out bowling.

It left Mitch, though, with a kind of a problem. He couldn't take his information to his boss, Lieutenant Decker, on account Decker would follow up and crack the case, and Charlie Tracy would know right off that Mitch was responsible. Mitch thought of talking it over with Jub Freeman, his lab friend who was about the only guy he could trust not to shoot off his mouth. Still, why put Jub on the spot?

About all that was left was to go see Charlie Tracy and tell him the whole business. Except he'd be telling Charlie about an investigation Mitch had made behind his back, which was no good, either.

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So, like he always did, Mitch left his problem at Headquarters and didn't take it home with him. He slept fine and didn't worry or think of the Lasker business until he was back on the job, and then he came up with a decision: Do nothing. Wait a while. Maybe something would happen. If you kept your eyes open, you usually managed to slide out of a mess. That's the way it had been in the past, and that's how it would be this time, too.

At the regular briefing that morning it looked like there wasn't much doing. There were a couple of new numbers of stolen cars to watch for, the guy who'd held up the post office hadn't showed, the gas-station bandits were still loose, and nobody had caught the bank robber or the con man or any of the muggers. The only new thing was a phone call from the warden up at the penitentiary.

It seemed the warden was worried. This Sherbourne who'd escaped was in for a long term. He'd had a couple of robberies and he'd shot up a cop. But what worried the warden was this moonlight business. Sherbourne had stolen a whole carton of Moonlight records a few years ago, on account his wife was nuts about it and it used to be sort of their theme song. According to what the warden had heard, Sherbourne figured his wife had hooked up with this guy they called the Moonlight Bandit, and playing the thing was like a slap in Sherbourne's face, and Sherbourne had gone off the handle. He was trying to locate her and kill her or her guy or else the pair of them.

Lieutenant Decker figured the gang ought to check with their various contacts and see if they could locate Sherbourne's wife. Or former wife. It wasn't clear whether they were divorced or not.

That was about it, and the gang broke up talking about the Moonlight Bandit and how the bunch up in the Fourth would look pretty sick if the real one showed up after they'd made all the fuss over Eckert.

Mitch felt a little better, now that the Moonlight case was out in the open again. Still, here he was pretty sure he had all the answers. The way he sliced it, Sherbourne's wife was now Mrs. Lasker. She'd only been married to Lasker for a couple of years—Ronny had told Joey that much. So it was only a matter of getting some of the Moonlight victims to identify the telephone voice. Once Mitch had that, they could take the Laskers into custody and it would be just a question of

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time before somebody ran Sherbourne into the ground.

Mitch took his idea up to the lab, where Jub Freeman worked. Only this morning Jub didn't have much to do. He was just polishing some of his equipment.

"What's cooking?" Jub asked.

"I want to call somebody and get a voice recording. Okay?"

"Easy," Jub said. "What for?"

"Nothing much. I'm studying electrocution."

Jub laughed and Mitch laughed, and Jub didn't know whether Mitch had got mixed up on "elocution" or not, and Mitch didn't say. They kidded around while Jub set up the tape. All Mitch had to do was disguise his voice a little so she wouldn't remember it from the other day. Then he'd call the Lasker number, string Mrs. Lasker along with some kind of a story, and get her talking.

He phoned the number and she answered. Would she accept a new cake mix? His company wanted some housewives to try it and say what they thought of it. She refused, but she was nice about it and Mitch got a pretty fair sampling of her voice. He managed to turn off the machine whenever he was speaking and to switch it on for her, so that nobody'd know he had anything to do with the tape. When he finished, he went to the lab.

"Thanks," he said to Jub. "Want to play it back for me? Then I'll want a machine to take around so I can let people listen."

"You got me guessing," Jub said. "Why not come out with it?"

"You're better off not knowing, except I'll tell you this much—it's an angle I've got on this Moonlight kid."

"Beethoven?" Jub said, grinning.

Mitch shrugged. "All this talk about it, and I don't even know what it sounds like."

"I can give you a pretty good idea of it," Jub said. He whistled a few bars, and they stopped Mitch cold.

"That!" he said. "Geez!"

"What's the matter?"

"I heard that yesterday," Mitch said. "On a record. In a place where I happened to be. And I better go back there and check before there's trouble."

He hurried downstairs, along the corridor, and was on his way out passing the sergeant's desk, when the sergeant called out to him.

"Taylor, you heard it?"

"Heard what?"

"Signal nineteen. It just came in."

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Signal 19—that meant a homicide and for the Homicide Squad to roll. With kind of a sinking feeling Mitch said, "Where?"

The address was the one he didn't want to hear. "1808 Bennett."

Mitch went over there with Lieutenant Decker and a couple of the boys. Except for a pair of patrolmen they were the first ones on the scene, and one of the patrolmen stuck out his chest and gave his report. It seemed he and his partner had been cruising past MacFarlane's place when they heard a shot, and then this guy came running out and they grabbed him. Like sometimes happens after a homicide, all the steam goes out of the perpetrator and he gives up without a fight and just wants to tell about it.

It was Sherbourne all right, and as the warden had said, he'd come down here to get MacFarlane, who was the real Moonlight Bandit and was shacking up with Sherbourne's wife. It took Sherbourne a couple of days to locate them, but when he did, he just came in and mowed MacFarlane down, and so Mitch was pretty lucky he hadn't come out and said he had a case against the Laskers.

MacFarlane's dead body was inside, in the back room where he and the Sherbourne dame had lived. There was a bunch of junk around, mostly loot from the burglaries, and it was the easiest thing in the world for Mitch to spot the stamp album, open it up, and find Ronny's name written inside of it. Mitch just stuck it under his arm when he walked out.

He gave the thing to Joey that night and Mitch figured everything was now under control. Until the next night when Joey came home in tears.

"Daddy," he said, "Ronny won't play with me any more. He says we can't be friends, his daddy won't let him."

"Why not?"

"I don't know, and Ronny neither."

Maybe not, but Mitch was pretty sure he knew. Lasker figured Mitch was on to him, and he didn't want Mitch on his neck. Besides, Mitch knew all about the stamp stuff, how it was only worth a buck fifty. If Mitch told Joey and Joey repeated it to Ronny, then Ronny was liable to find out his old man was a cheat and a liar.

That was why Lasker wanted to keep Joey and Ronny apart. Only how could you explain all that to a nine-year-old like Joey? Maybe he'd begin to think all fathers were alike. And Mitch sure wouldn't want Joey to think something like that.

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FROM A LAWYER'S ARCHIVES

a *NEW* legal-detective story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

first magazine publication in the United States

About a Siamese cat officially named Mai Tsun (familiarly known as Sunny), the offspring of The Emperor Mu and Lady Lotus Flower, and a real weirdo of a will . . . Of course you know that Siamese cats are "exceptionally gifted creatures endowed with almost supernatural powers of understanding and sympathy" . . .

THE BLACKMAILING OF MR. JUSTICE BALL

by MICHAEL GILBERT

"So Popsy is dead at last," said Mr. Rumbold. "Extreme senility, coupled with fits. Excellent!"

It was the habit of the senior partner in the firm of Wragg & Rumbold, solicitors of Coleman Street, to open his mail every morning with the assistance of his senior managing clerk, Mr. Silverlight. The two old gentlemen had joined the firm on the same day in the early 'thirties, Mr. Rumbold as an articled clerk, Mr. Silverlight as a mailroom boy.

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Silverlight. "That is indeed a blessing."

"Topsy was run over two years ago, wasn't she?"

"At her age she shouldn't have been in the road at all."

"And that's the end of them all."

"It's the end of a chapter," said Mr. Silverlight.

And so it was, thought Mr.

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Rumbold. The end of a long chapter, a chapter which had started nearly twenty years before, when Miss Manciple had come in to make her will. He could see her now, sitting in the very chair occupied by Mr. Silverlight, her hands clasped over the silver knob of an ebony walking stick, her light-gray, slightly mad eyes fixed disconcertingly on him.

Her instructions, however, had been perfectly clear.

"I have no direct descendants," she said. "The closest members of my family are my nephew Norman and my niece Venetia. And when I say they are my closest relatives I must add, Mr. Rumbold, that neither of them has been all that close. A small gift at Christmas, a card on my birthday. Is that how your family treats you?"

"I'm lucky if they remember my birthday," said Mr. Rumbold. "But pray proceed."

"My most constant and faithful companion for the last ten years has been my darling Siamese cat, Sunny. Mai Tsun is her official name, but she is always called Sunny. People will tell you that Siamese cats are aloof and unfriendly. It's a fallacy. They are extremely intelligent, far more so than most human beings. They have extrasensory perception and can communicate with each other over wide distances. But they are not proud about it. If you treat them as equals they are perfectly willing to reciprocate. After I go, our sole care must be for her."

"You mean you wish to leave her all your money?"

"Is that possible?"

"Well, no," said Mr. Rumbold, wishing that his clients would not constantly spring problems like this on him. "But what you could do is to direct that the income from your estate be devoted to the upkeep of your present house as a home for Sunny and to pay the wages of a suitable person to look after her. You have a companion?"

"Miss Tape, yes."

Mr. Rumbold remembered Miss Tape, a mouselike creature who sometimes accompanied Miss Manciple on her jaunts to London.

"Splendid," he said. "We will direct that she shall be allowed to live in the house, be paid a salary, and look after things. I take it that when Sunny finally dies—"

"Siamese cats do not die, Mr. Rumbold. Their souls travel onward, and upward, to a plane altogether higher than anything we can comprehend."

"When Sunny passes on," amended Mr. Rumbold adroitly, "I take it you would wish

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Miss Tape to have an annuity."

"A small annuity. Her usefulness will then be over."

"And subject to that, the estate then to go equally to Norman and Venetia—"

"What happens then," said Miss Manciple, "is a matter of indifference to me. Let me have the document to sign as soon as you can."

Mr. Rumbold had discussed the problem with Mr. Silverlight.

"I suppose we're not worried by the rule against perpetuities," said Mr. Silverlight. "Even if the first part isn't charitable, there's a gift over."

"Surely we have a life in being—"

Mr. Silverlight looked doubtful. "I'd always understood that to mean a human life," he said. "Wasn't there a case where someone tried to settle a fund during the life span of a giant tortoise? It was overruled in the Court of Appeal."

"What we'll do," said Mr. Rumbold, "is to say that the income of the estate shall be devoted to paying the outgoings of the house and a salary of five hundred pounds a year to Miss Tape for a period of twenty-one years *or* the life span of the cat, Sunny, whichever is the shorter. That would be safe. A cat couldn't possibly live to be thirty-one, could it?"

"I don't think so," said Mr. Silverlight. "Who's going to be executor?"

"I am."

"There'll be trouble over this, you know."

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Rumbold sadly.

"That nephew, Norman. He's not a very agreeable character. An insurance investigator, I believe."

"I've never met him. But I do remember the niece. She seemed pleasant enough."

"She's married a stockbroker. I don't think he's going to like it either."

"Don't let's cross our bridges before we come to them," said Mr. Rumbold. "This blasted cat may die before Miss Manciple."

The trouble which Mr. Silverlight had anticipated took concrete form some three years later. The death of Miss Manciple was not unexpected. Shortly after executing her will and lodging it at her bank she had suffered the first of a number of slight strokes. For the last nine months, with her mind gradually failing, she had been confined to her bed, and her affairs had been looked after by Mr. Rumbold with the aid of a Power of Attorney.

What did cause surprise was the will itself. For Miss Manciple had altered it. Over the clause which contained the

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words, "during the lifetime of my Siamese cat, Sunny," she had inserted, in her crabbed but legible handwriting, the words, "and of her legitimate offspring."

"We shall be in the Probate Court for certain," said Mr. Rumbold. He said it without pleasure. Like most solicitors he regarded litigation as a nuisance, something which disrupted the routine of the office, which might come out well, but was equally likely to come out badly, and for which in either contingency a solicitor was inadequately remunerated.

"I hope we get a reasonable judge," said Mr. Silverlight. "I can think of one or two who are going to be pretty scathing about this will. Why on earth did we let her monkey about with it?"

"We had no say in the matter," said Mr. Rumbold. "She simply took it away, and she knew how to have it executed properly—which, I must admit, she has done—and popped it into her bank. I haven't seen it from that day to this."

"Suppose we get Mr. Justice Ball," said Mr. Silverlight.

"I hope to God we don't," said Mr. Rumbold, and being a superstitious man he reached out to touch wood. His hand actually lighted on the base of his table lamp, which was made of plastic, and this may have accounted for the fact that when the case, *In re the Estate of Alice Manciple*, came in front of the Probate Division it was set down in Mr. Justice Ball's list.

It is an undoubted fact that Mr. Rumbold's reactions to this news would, at that period in the late 'forties, have been shared by most practicing solicitors. It is less easy to explain why. Mr. Justice Ball was an excellent lawyer and a man of iron integrity. In the days when such things were liable to happen to judges he would cheerfully have gone to the Tower, or even to the block, to uphold the independence of the Judiciary against the Crown.

A bachelor and a man of austere habits, Mr. Justice Ball's private life was a model to a laxer generation. If he had any weaknesses they were professional rather than human. He was reputed to dislike solicitors. This was thought to arise from the fact that, as a young barrister, he had depended to a certain extent on their patronage, and now that he was on the bench he was not averse to getting a bit of his own back. He was also rather inclined, if he felt that counsel were not doing the job properly, to

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conduct cases for himself, cross-examining the witnesses on both sides at greater length than the barristers.

Hargest Macrea, Q.C., gazed around the crowded court and reflected, not for the first time, that it was cases of what the papers like to describe as human interest rather than cases of real legal significance that got all the publicity. He was a tough and experienced advocate and had been selected by Mr. Rumbold as someone unlikely to be intimidated by the judge.

"The facts in this case, my Lord," he said, "are somewhat unusual. The deceased was a lady of strong character and decided views. She was the possessor of a substantial fortune, and a freehold house at Much Hadham, where she lived in comfortable circumstances, looked after by her companion, Miss Tape, and enjoying the company of a highly bred female Siamese cat.

"These animals, as your Lordship may be aware, are exceptionally gifted creatures and excellent companions for people of intelligence, being themselves endowed with almost supernatural powers of understanding and sympathy."

"You are preaching to the converted, Mr. Macrea," said the judge. "I happen to be the owner of such an animal."

Macrea, who had of course been well aware of this, smiled politely. He said, "This particular cat was officially named Mai Tsun, but was familiarly known in the house as Sunny."

"When you say 'officially,' you mean this was the name under which she was registered in the records of the Siamese Cat Club?"

"That is so, my Lord. These records showed that she was the offspring of a male cat, The Emperor Mu, and a female cat, Lady Lotus Flower. The records also identify the grandparents and the great-grandparents on the male and female side."

"Your object in this excursus into the genealogy of the animal, Mr. Macrea, is, I assume, designed to cover the expression *'legitimate* issue'?"

"Exactly, my Lord. Miss Manciple's will has the effect, if I may use a lay expression, of tying up her estate for a period defined as 'during the lifetime of my Siamese cat, Sunny, and of her legitimate offspring.' This has been interpreted by her executor to mean kittens born as the result of a regular union which would be recognized by the Siamese Cat Club. I should add that, shortly after the will was made, Sunny did

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give birth to a litter of six kittens, but since it was apparent, from their color and other characteristics, that they were the result of a casual amour with a neighboring marmalade-colored tomcat, they were disregarded and in fact were disposed of.

"However, at the end of last year, although by then of a very advanced age for child-bearing, Sunny was successfully mated with a pedigreed Siamese cat, named Rampant Orchid, and produced four kittens, one male and three female. The deceased christened the eldest two Venetia and Norman, after her niece and nephew—the plaintiffs in this case—and the two younger ones Popsy and Topsy. It was thought right to have these kittens separately represented. My learned friend Mr. Kaye appears for them."

"And who is paying Mr. Kaye's fee, may I ask?"

"Being without any means of support the kittens were able to obtain assistance from the Legal Aid Fund."

Mr. Justice Ball said something under his breath which, fortunately, the official reporter failed to catch. It was known that he did not approve of the recently promulgated Legal Aid Advice Act.

"I will now call my instructing solicitor, Mr. Rumbold, who will prove the will formally."

Mr. Rumbold gave his evidence and was not cross-examined by Mr. Leopold, the barrister appearing for Norman and Venetia. The judge, however, seemed unwilling to let him go. He said, "Am I to understand that you had no knowledge of this curious handwritten addition to the will you drew up?"

"That is so, my Lord," said Mr. Rumbold, his heart sinking.

"And do your clients usually attempt to improve on your draftsmanship?"

"It is very unusual."

"Did you not ask to see the will after it had been executed?"

"I asked Miss Manciple to return it to me, but she sent it straight to her bank."

"Have you any idea why she should do so?"

"Possibly, my Lord, she considered that I might be critical of her amendment."

"That would seem to argue a lack of confidence in her solicitor," said Mr. Justice Ball. Since this did not appear to be a question, Mr. Rumbold thought it wiser to say nothing, and the judge, after peering at him over his spectacles with a look of loathing, dismissed him. Mr. Rumbold returned, fuming, to his seat.

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The next witness was Miss Tape. After being told several times by the judge to speak up she produced a reasonably clear account of life at Much Hadham.

The income of the estate had been sufficient to run the house, to keep Sunny, her four offspring, and Miss Tape in modest comfort. It was thought very unlikely that Sunny, now in her thirteenth year, could produce any further offspring, but the four kittens were all healthy and might well live for twelve or even fifteen years more.

Mr. Leopold rose to cross-examine with an insinuating smile.

He said, "You would agree, would you not, Miss Tape, that twelve was an exceptional age for a cat to produce kittens."

"Oh, yes. We were quite surprised."

"But did it happen, Miss Tape?"

Miss Tape looked startled. Macrea, rising swiftly to his feet, said, "I should point out, my Lord, that this witness was not present when the kittens were born. This happy event took place in the presence of the local veterinary surgeon, who will be giving evidence later."

"My question has been misunderstood," said Mr. Leopold. "I am not suggesting that the four Siamese kittens, who are the third to the sixth defendants in this case, are not the legitimate offspring of *a* female Siamese cat. What I am suggesting is that they are not, and could not be, the offspring of the deceased's cat, Sunny."

"And why do you say it is impossible, Mr. Leopold?"

"Because, my Lord, Sunny died some months before the birth of these particular kittens."

Norman, whose investigations had unearthed this piece of information a week earlier, grinned unpleasantly. Macrea turned a startled gaze on Mr. Rumbold and all the reporters raised their heads at once, and then, like a line of violinists obedient to the baton of the conductor, started to scribble in unison, *Sensation in Court.*

"I take it, Mr. Leopold," said the judge, "that you propose to produce some evidence in support of this startling assertion."

"Certainly," said Mr. Leopold. He turned to Miss Tape, who seemed to be trying to conceal herself in the witness box, and said, "Is it not a fact, Miss Tape, that some four or five months before Miss Manciple died, Sunny herself succumbed to the onset of old age? And is it not also a fact that you approached a breeder of

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Siamese cats in the Midlands—a Mr. Carnworth, whom I shall call if I have to—and purchased from him an eight-year-old female cat as closely resembling Sunny as possible and substituted her for the deceased animal?"

It was not possible to tell whether Miss Tape said yes or no. It is probable that she merely gulped.

"Are you suggesting," said Mr. Justice Ball, "that Miss Manciple, who was devotedly attached to her cat, would not have noticed the substitution at once?"

"Normally, my Lord, I have no doubt she would have. But you will recollect that she had suffered from a cumulative series of strokes, and her faculties were by that time seriously impaired. Also she was confined to her bed, and the animal was only permitted into her room for brief periods."

Mr. Justice Ball turned the full force of his considerable personality on the witness and said, "Is what counsel suggests correct or is it not, Miss Tape?"

Whereupon Miss Tape had hysterics.

The judge said, "I will adjourn the court until this witness feels able to resume."

The reporters raced for the nearest telephones.

When the court reassembled half an hour later, it was observed that Miss Tape was no longer in the box. Macrea, who had in the interval been doing some hard thinking and a certain amount of fast talking, rose to his feet.

He said, "I have discussed this development with learned counsel on the other side, my Lord, and he has agreed to my suggestion that we proceed on the basis that we agree Miss Manciple's original pet, Sunny, did die at a date some months before her owner's death, and that the present incumbent—if I may so express it—is another cat called Sunny, who is the mother of the third to the sixth defendants."

"But if you concede this, Mr. Macrea, what is left of your case?"

"With respect, I must direct your Lordship's attention to the wording of the will. This says, 'during the lifetime of my Siamese cat, Sunny, and of her legitimate offspring.' In my submission this wording precisely covers the facts of the case as we now know them. The animal in question *was* a Siamese cat. It *was* known about the house by the name of Sunny, and it *did* belong to the deceased, having been very generously given to her by Miss Tape to replace the previous animal. Her motive for concealing the

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substitution was the very understandable one that she did not wish to upset Miss Manciple during the closing months of her life."

"Even if this ingenious argument were accepted—and I feel sure that Mr. Leopold will have something to say about it—"

"Indeed, yes, my Lord."

"—even if it were accepted, is it not quite plain that the animal to which Miss Manciple intended to refer in her will was not the substitute—I should almost say, the impostor—which had taken her place?"

"I shall argue, my Lord," said Macrea, "that it has long been accepted that this court will pay very little attention to what testators imagine they mean in their wills and will confine themselves strictly to what the words say—"

When the court adjourned, Macrea said to Mr. Rumbold, "Well, it was worth trying. But it's pretty clear that the judge is hostile. I was surprised that he bothered to reserve judgment until tomorrow."

"I know exactly why he reserved judgment," said Mr. Rumbold. "He has gone home to his bachelor apartment to spend a long and pleasant evening drafting a judgment that will be full of criticism of the slovenly habits of solicitors, and he may even go so far as to suggest that the whole thing was a plot and that I was a party to it from the beginning. I wouldn't put it past him to award costs against me personally."

"I'm afraid you may be right," said Macrea.

But as it turned out, they were both wrong.

On the following morning Mr. Justice Ball kept his court waiting. This was unusual. He was normally punctual to the second. When he did appear it was evident that he was not himself. His eyes were bloodshot and the dark shadows underneath them suggested that he had not slept well, if at all, on the previous night. He had also apparently cut himself while shaving, for there was a broad strip of sticking-plaster down the side of his jaw.

His judgment was short and to the point. He upheld the view that the reference in the will to 'my Siamese cat, Sunny' was equally apt as a description of the second cat, and that the relatives, therefore, would have to wait until the death of the last of the four kittens before claiming any share in the estate.

Even now, fifteen years later, Mr. Rumbold had no idea how this happy and entirely

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unexpected result had been achieved.

In wilder countries, in earlier and less civilized times, he might have supposed that severe pressures had been brought to bear on Mr. Justice Ball, that he had been subjected to some form of intimidation or blackmail which, in the course of a single night, had forced him to change his mind. But in England, in that day and age, such an explanation was inconceivable. And even if it had been conceivable, the very last person who would have yielded to such pressure would have been Mr. Justice Ball.

The only other explanation which occurred to Mr. Rumbold was that he had had some form of brainstorm. But this had been conclusively disproved in the judge's very next case, an exceedingly complicated affair dealing with Bills of Exchange which Mr. Justice Ball handled with all his accustomed mastery, managing, in the course of it, to be rude to the solicitors on both sides.

"It's a mystery," said Mr. Rumbold.

Mr. Silverlight, who appeared to divine what Mr. Rumbold was thinking about, coughed discreetly. He said, "Previously I had never ventured to disclose something which was said to me, on that occasion, by Mr. Justice Ball's clerk, Mr. Henry. He and I were very old friends and he told me something, under the seal of strict secrecy. It may have had some bearing on the matter."

"Oh?" said Mr. Rumbold.

"Now that the last of the protagonists in the case is dead, I feel absolved from my undertaking. I cannot, of course, vouch for the truth of this. It is only what Mr. Henry told me."

"Go on," said Mr. Rumbold.

"Apparently when Mr. Justice Ball returned home that night he was astonished not to be greeted, in the usual friendly fashion, by his own Siamese cat, a fine animal—I cannot recollect the name in the original Siamese, but in translation it was Cultivated Tigress. Not only did she fail to greet him, she actually turned her back on him. He was astounded. Such a thing had never occurred before. But worse was to follow.

"When he settled down after dinner to write his judgment—and you may surmise that it was *not* the judgment he eventually delivered—Cultivated Tigress came quietly into the room and buried her claws in his ankle. By this time Mr. Justice Ball was thoroughly upset, and it occurred to him to ring up Mr. Henry, who was

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also a cat lover. Mr. Henry was so alarmed that he hurried round. He found the judge in a state of disarray and bleeding from a long scratch down the side of his jaw, incurred when he had incautiously tried to pick up and soothe his pet.

"It was then that Mr. Henry ventured to suggest that what they had encountered was an example of that extrasensory perception for which Siamese cats were noted. The judge at first pooh-poohed the idea, but Mr. Henry persuaded him to try an experiment. He said, 'Sit down and start to rewrite your opinion in a manner favorable to Sunny and her offspring.' To humor his clerk, the judge did so. The effect was electric and instantaneous. Cultivated Tigress became her former friendly self."

"Silverlight," said Mr. Rumbold sternly, "you're pulling my leg."

"On the contrary, I had the story from Mr. Henry, who witnessed it himself."

"Then he was pulling *your* leg," said Mr. Rumbold. "All the same, I feel glad that I have always stuck to bull-terriers myself."

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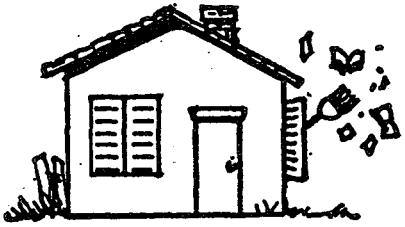

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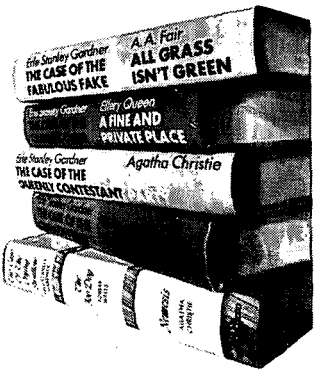

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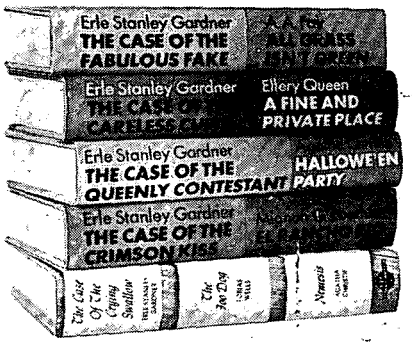
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